

# The Journal of Liberal Religion

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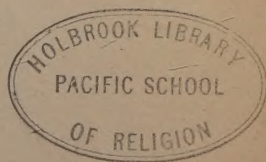
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# Religion and Ethics in Modern Civilization

FRANK H. KNIGHT

## I.

Zealous Christians and skeptical or antagonistic critics agree that modern society is by no means Christian; they differ as to attitude, of deploring or rejoicing. Its spokesmen commonly teach that a general and thoroughgoing acceptance of Christianity would solve all our social problems. On the other hand, extreme critics hold that Christianity is reconcilable with a high level of civilization only because it is not taken seriously, because in practice its content is always defined in terms of the current ethical "common-sense."

The common line of criticism is that Christianity presents a beautiful and lofty ideal, but that it is "impracticable." This is often coupled with the view that, while it was appropriate to the situation in which it was promulgated, the vast changes in "conditions" between first-century Palestine and twentieth-century Europe or America make its suitability for the earlier setting a presumption against its fitting the later. It is also pointed out that the early Christians themselves expected the immediate Second Coming of Christ, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, which would end all mundane problems, and hence they were not dealing with problems of distant times. The aim of this essay is to develop a more thoroughgoing version of the theme of historical change and "culture lag" in its relation to religious ethics. The thesis will be that the important difference between the modern situation and that of the Roman Empire—or any other culture situation known to history—goes far deeper than a change in social conditions, in any usual or reasonable interpretation of the words. It is true that differences of the latter sort are very great, particularly in the fields of economic and political life, where what we think of as modern problems chiefly arise. But these changes must be passed over. What we shall emphasize as important is the revolutionary change in man himself, in his deepest ideals, his conception of himself and of the Cosmos, and in his conception of God and his relation to God—any God in whom he cares to believe, or can believe. In the broadest terms, we have to contrast the liberal philosophy of life with that of religion in the traditional sense.



However, our aim is neither mere analysis for its own sake, nor mere negation. Our purpose is rather to point out the futility of attacking the moral problems of our culture in the manner actually characteristic of the spokesmen of Christianity, and of others who discuss these problems in explicitly ethical terms. And the argument should indicate something as to the moral attitude and line of action really called for. It should indeed be understood that our task is by no means purely to attack traditional religion. We are not attributing the "crisis in modern civilization" to the excessive application of the principles of Christianity. But it does not follow that neglect of religion has been the cause, nor that a return to any orthodoxy is the remedy; and too much looking to religion rather than to intelligence and rational ethics, may be a definite evil.

## II

Religions, with all their vast differences, are fundamentally alike in the way in which they meet both the social needs and the spiritual cravings of men. The social function of religion is rooted in the fact that man is a dissatisfied animal, a critic of other men, of society, of the world, and even of himself. He has intelligence, in varying amount and kind, but is more conspicuous for egotism, boundless imagination, and manifold romanticism. Roughly in proportion to his human development, he finds nearly everything to be wrong, and for this he is disposed to blame other people and social institutions; and especially he lays the blame for the institutions on particular individuals who seem to be beneficiaries of their wrongness, those who are, or whom he imagines to be, in power. Nearly any intelligent and energetic individual thinks he could reconstruct society according to a far more admirable pattern, if his fellows would only follow his advice or obey his orders; and the natural disposition is to try to find some way to force them to do just that. Between such people and Utopia stand the stupidity and traditionalism of the masses of men, and the "vested interests." The sinister character of such traits is manifest; for in order to live a human life, men require organized society with a high degree of stability. The social function of religion is through appeal to supernatural sanctions—hence to prudence and fear—to suppress the destructive tendencies of romantic human nature, to force men to accept the established order of things on which life is dependent.

At the same time, man, the romantic fool, craves, or thinks he craves, a life without frustration or uncertainty, or antagonism or strife with the world or his fellows; in short, he yearns for "peace." Obviously, there are two possible ways for securing harmony between man's restless spirit and his world. One way is to change the world. This way is emphasized by the liberal philosophy of life, and more or less by liberal religion. It could not be followed prior to very modern times, for under earlier conditions it would have been fatally destructive. The other way of reconciliation is for man to find the wrong in himself and to change his own nature, to suppress and extirpate his restless cravings and "accept the universe." This is the religious way. Different religions have different formulae for the reconciliation. Hinduism and Buddhism represent the extreme of acceptance and repression, and similar was the Stoic ideal of re-absorption of the soul into the world-soul, parallel to the commingling of the body in the world of matter. The Jewish-Christian formula is "Love"—love of God and of one's fellow men.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>We must pass over other factors in religion, notably the whole category of magic—no doubt as important as the factors referred to.

Space limits also exclude any real discussion of the obviously vital topic, the actual meaning of Christian ethics. We can only use, with a somewhat dogmatic or question-begging interpretation, the "stock" words and phrases of the New Testament, which Christians agree in citing and accepting as authoritative, if they agree on anything. The bracketing of Judaism and Christianity as Love-religion should suggest several perennial problems as to the relation between love and other key concepts such as faith, grace, and especially the law. (The primary reference is of course to the "Great Commandment", of the Gospels, the two parts of which are quotations from Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:4 respectively). Faith may be disposed of rather simply as an implication of love, not distinct from it. The concept and doctrine of Grace may be passed over, from our point of view, along with all strictly religious or "eschatological" matters.

The "Law," however, calls for a word, because an ambiguity in this connection is central for our argument. The teaching of Jesus carried a somewhat "liberal" interpretation of the Jewish law, in contrast with Pharisaic literalism. The teaching of Paul called more emphatically for disregard of the purely ritualistic element (in the Jewish law). But both assumed the ethical content as divinely ordained and eternally valid—and as complete and closed. The last is the main point; Christian teaching as a whole regarded "the law" as *given*, including the commands of all *de jure* authorities. But the serious ethical problems of our time center in the making and enforcement of law by democratic process. If the New Testament means what it says, it excludes the Christian from participation in political activity, except obedience to the law as he finds it, in the above inclusive sense. This applies particularly to law enforcement, which would be a clear violation of the injunction to "resist not evil." (Hiring policemen or soldiers to do the "dirty work" for us will hardly clear our own skirts).



The problem of religion arises largely out of the relation between its social and psychological functions. The simple and obvious solution of the second problem, of escaping conflict and securing peace, would seem to be suicide. Life without struggle would merely be death. Yet men find an abundance of "good reasons" for not adopting this solution. One of these is the fear that it will not work—"for in that sleep of death what dreams may come?" The "real reasons" cannot occupy us here, but one is certainly the antithesis of the fear that death may not be the end, i.e., the fear that it is. Of course "homo romanticus" does not know what he wants, but it is easy to see that he rarely wants "to die; to sleep; no more." Hence, some compromise must be found between peace and activity, between death and life, with its toil, struggle, and defeat, but also with some romantic adventure, and occasional triumphs. At a minimum, "the machinery must be kept going," in the individual body and in society, at some level, and as long as possible.

This dilemma confronts the Judaeo-Christian gospel of love, as well as any other formula for the reconciliation of man and the world from the "spiritual" side. In the Christian teaching, and specifically in the characteristic text of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:25-34, Luke 12:22-31) the theory seems to be that, if men will really embrace "righteousness" (love, including faith), God will at once establish his Kingdom on earth, and all environmental (economic) problems, as well as problems of human conflict, will cease from troubling. With reference to economics, we meet here with an extreme development of magical ideas, though it is a peculiarly "white" magic.<sup>2</sup> The same general view might be rationalized without appeal to the supernatural by transferring the faith and trust from God as a personal being outside or inside the world to "social forces," such as custom, including religion. Or, it might mean trust in men as individuals, or possibly even as rulers. Or the view might be that, no matter whether or not his problems are solved, the individual believer should practice faith and love à outrance, even at the cost of suffering, even martyrdom. In this case, the individual would undoubtedly have to be supported

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In a notable and widely read volume on *Christian Ethics and Modern Problems*, Dean W. R. Inge cites from Augustine the principle, *ama et fac quod vis*, and expresses approval, but adds the "assertion" that Christianity is not antinomian! (*Op. cit.*, p. 390 of popular ed. of 1932; p. 410 in earlier editions.)

<sup>2</sup>As the present writer reads the texts, this is clearly and unequivocally what Paul and the post-Resurrection Christians believed and taught.

by the belief that "God" will grant adequate compensation in a future life of immortal bliss; the "Kingdom" would be transferred from this world to the next (which actually happened when the Parousia failed to materialize).

Considerable support may be found in the New Testament for all these interpretations. And apart from the doctrine of immortality, about which we have unhappily no knowledge, there is undoubtedly much to be said for all of them. But they all practically have to be dismissed, or crippled with reservations, for present Western Civilization. Modern men simply do not believe in any of them to a point where they will practice the love-gospel *à outrance*. Moreover, we must face the fact that modern men neither care for a life of peace and quiet nor ethically approve of this ideal. They want life, as action, effort, adventure and achievement, and they believe in a moral ideal of self-realization and self-development, through work and play and cultural activity, involving effort, risk and conflict, and calling for energy, intelligence and courage. Men believe in these things for their own sake, for what they mean in terms of "character," and also because of results which they are confident will flow from such conduct in the way of better conditions and opportunities of life for future human beings. Moreover, we moderns frame our conception of God in accord with these beliefs, as a worker and a co-worker with man.

On the other hand, we think we know that any thoroughgoing acceptance of the gospel of world-acceptance in any form would abolish not only progress but all civilization, which is to say all really human life. And we are sure that, while the life of savages, or brutes, may have some idyllic features which are absent from civilization, it is on the whole not merely unappealing to us, but falls short in its possibilities for the good life, even more seriously than does civilization, with all its shortcomings. At the same time, primitive social life does not afford that peace, security and freedom from anxiety which is the object of the religious craving itself. To achieve this state, men would have to cease to be men; and we believe it is "better" to be men than to be vegetables, even lilies of the field.

### III.

Looking back over the history of the Western World since the first century, we find these beliefs confirmed, as far as history



affords a test. Christianity had a reasonably fair trial at ordering the world and individual life for a "millennium" or so, and the result was very different from the Kingdom of God on earth. The period is, in fact, commonly referred to in history text-books as a "dark age" between two civilizations. The Christian Church itself, from the time of its secure establishment (specifically in Western Europe) progressively ceased to practice the doctrines of original Christianity, such as love, non-resistance, and taking no thought for the morrow. It taught others to obey, while it commanded; it aspired to be, and without scruple used all its power to become a political power system, an authoritarian, imperialistic state.<sup>2</sup> And this is what it apparently had to do to live; and churches, like men (or more so) seldom yearn to die. Moreover, its spokesmen took and enjoyed the usual perquisites of power, notably wealth and luxury. The differences between the medieval Church and other state systems, in consequence of its theocratic basis, do not impress the modern student as great, or where they are real, as being conspicuously good. At the time of maximum religiosity in Western Europe, human life fitted about as well as has ever been the case, the famous formula—nasty, brutish and short. Medieval society was no more outstanding for equalitarianism, or justice, or peace, than it was for comfort or beauty in the everyday life of its typical member, the peasant.

The historical changes which caused or constituted the transition from medieval to modern Western Europe are of course a topic too large even for summary here. We need only note that an integral and vital factor was a revolt against the Church and destruction of most of its power, chiefly to the advantage at first of a new authority, the territorial state. With reference to their frankly political objectives, the new states exercised a large measure of control, in "Catholic" as well as in "Protestant" lands, over both religion and economic life. But in view of the underlying cultural and moral forces at work, political autocracy contained in itself the seeds of its own destruction. In the course of time, no very long period historically speaking, the struggle of

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<sup>2</sup>The change from a new, reforming religion to an old, established one, meant the loss of the original character of Christianity as a continuation of the prophetic tradition in Judaism and transformation into the priestly type. The mixture of forms was further multiplied by various degrees and kinds of rationalization under the influence of modern science and philosophic thought, until the content of "Christianity" today is practically anything that is considered respectable in any community which in the course of history has come to call itself Christian.



the individual for both religious and economic freedom led progressively to victory. The victory carried with it, as what we deem justified in calling an inevitable consequence, the establishment of political freedom or individualism in the shape of democratic government, representative in structure and committed to the ideal of maximum individual liberty. The role of government, even in the freest, most democratic form, was to be minimized.

The story of the "Renaissance," and of modern history, must be taken as familiar matter. The revolutionary change was that men's minds were released from the medieval monkish ideal of poverty and submissiveness and turned in the direction of freedom and self-respect. The cult of obedience—to men who "obeyed God"—and lived on the choice cuts—was replaced in the masses by that of free activity, individual and associative, in work, play and culture, and specifically in the form of the progressive conquest of matter by mind or spirit.<sup>4</sup> We must emphasize the plurality of values involved in this ideal. It is considered good not merely because it is pleasant or interesting to the individual, or because it leads to "useful" results, or to "material", or even cultural progress; but also and even primarily because such activity is the only way to develop human personality in the modern, positive interpretation of that concept.

#### IV

As to the "results" of this change in outlook, we may first mention what is in itself least important, the vast rise in the standard of living, particularly of the masses. In view of the flood of nonsense which is current regarding the "materialism" of modern liberal culture, it should be emphasized that the main difference in content between a high standard of living and a low one lies in the field of esthetic and social values; "decency," and indeed cleanliness, is only a very low level of beauty. One great difference between liberal civilization and religious barbarism roots in the recognition that beauty is a good in human life (not only in religion—see Note 6 below) and that it is rightfully expensive.

It is equally necessary to emphasize that the great achievement

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<sup>4</sup>The third member of the monkish trio of virtues, "chastity," was not, of course, abolished; but it was fundamentally reinterpreted, in terms of esthetic and rational conceptions and the requisites for a worthy family life.

of modern civilization in the scale of living lies in the diffusion of standards of decency, a minimum of beauty, among the masses of the people, which is properly a moral rather than even an esthetic achievement. The living standards of the potentates, political or religious or economic, have, in essentials, been far less affected. It is a relatively simple matter for a society to provide the amenities, and even a high level of beauty and culture, for a small élite, if the lives of the masses are used as a means to that end, through an appropriate system of power and servility relations. The courts of the more prosperous Pharaohs probably had a real standard of life about as high as has ever been achieved. The complaint as to the materialism of our civilization reflects the interest of beneficiaries of power relations in our own society; one main root of it is the fact that the "lower classes" have come to demand a fair share in the benefits of cultured life, and to show a degree of independence and self-respect.

It is more defensible to designate as "materialistic" the achievements in the field of health, which affect the upper classes as well as the lower, if in lesser degree. Only in a civilization dominated by the modern spirit would it have been possible to eliminate the great epidemics which so frequently decimated—and constantly terrorized—the population of medieval Christian Europe. But not many who pine for a supposed golden age in the past want to exchange rational medicine for the practices of savages or pre-scientific society.

Other fields of civilized achievement in the Western world, are commonly less emphasized, and when mentioned are nearly always *wrongly* treated as non-materialistic, in contrast with the higher standard of living. First, as to scientific knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live, and of ourselves as a part of it. It is true that these have proven to be "useful" in the ordinary, naive meaning of the word; they are inseparably bound up with the growth of "wealth" as components in the "power" of mind over matter. But on the one hand they are ends, in any defensible conception of ends, and on the other they are, like beauty, very expensive. And again, the diffusion of education, in the broad sense, among the masses is a more important achievement of modern civilization than is the reaching of higher peaks of learning or intellectual insight.

What is back of the wail about materialism, as already suggested, is that some people abuse their freedom—"other" people, of course



—and usually in ways which inconvenience “us,” the élite who do the complaining (and who typically make our living by judging others, and selling the product). But this is not the whole story. A free and highly organized society does afford wide opportunity for the abuse of power; and it is inevitable, while men are imperfect, that many will yield to the temptation. In modern liberalism the emphasis on freedom has also tended to be extreme and uncritical, which has encouraged irresponsibility; and it has also encouraged undue emphasis on getting power, in comparison with reflection on the ends or values for which power is to be used. These facts define a major problem and task of free culture. Society must educate and restrain, must make men intelligent and moral in such a way and degree, and create such a social order, that they can be trusted with the freedom, which means the power, required for the good life.

## V

We turn now from esthetics to ethics or morality, in the narrower and more usual connotation of terms which are used with little regard for critical definition, partly because this field of discourse is still so largely dominated by a tradition which was established under religious influence. It is true that “love” in the mystical-emotional sense of New Testament *agapē* is no longer accepted or professed as the substance of goodness. The question is whether this is a loss or a gain. It is almost superfluous to remark that it never was the real basis of the moral code of every-day life in a civilized society—not even for life in a convent or monastery, where order was always based on authority. Organization on a basis of “love” alone could hardly be approached in a self-contained society, i.e., without fraternalistic segregation, and moral, as well as economic parasitism. (The difficulty, as will later be suggested, is far less in everyone’s loving his neighbor as himself than in his loving his neighbor’s children as his own, or treating them as if he did.) In modern society, personal relations rest on the ideals of mutual respect and friendliness, and especially on the “bourgeois virtues” of competence, foresight, and reliability, which are not conspicuous (to say the least) in New Testament teaching. “Love” in any reasonable meaning, is now recognized as a highly selective attitude, with its proper as well as its actual content varying infinitely from one situation to another. Or, in

modern usage, love as a moral virtue means love of the "values," truth, beauty and goodness (fairness and generosity) and especially—because they are so likely to be overlooked—competence and its correlate, good workmanship. If men and life are to be made better, it will surely be accomplished by cultivating these ideals and attitudes, and not by trying to teach everybody to love everybody else in the world with indiscriminating fervor.

Nor do we moderns generally think of goodness as "helpfulness," apart from the special situation of people in distress (as in the Good Samaritan story!) due to some calamity, or to serious inadequacy. And in such situations "sympathy" is rather the appropriate emotion. Of course we still talk much of "serving others" and "doing good"; but again, this is largely because explicit discussion takes place under religious or fraternalistic auspices or is sentimental bubbling. Modern ideas and ideals assume that "others" are also self-respecting human beings, and hence neither desire nor expect to be "served" but, within the bounds of their capacity, to stand on their own feet, to "play their own hands" in the game of social relations, and also to carry their share of common burdens. On the other hand, sympathy and helpfulness, in situations where these are called for, as well as friendliness and the absence of hostility and suspicion in ordinary human relations, have certainly been developed under modern "materialistic" and "commercialistic" civilization, far beyond the achievement of any other known society in which human relationships have extended beyond the scale of a small face-to-face group.

In positive terms, modern ethical ideals center in the concept of *freedom*, as indicated by the word "liberalism." Freedom means two things: First, maximum freedom for the individual, i.e. on the whole, for all individuals, as against coercion by anyone or in any form, specifically by law and the enforcement of law. This does not mean literal, "isolationist" individualism. Associative and specifically "organized" life, of a scope and intricacy undreamed of in the first century, is taken for granted, including freedom to consult advisers believed to be more competent than oneself. It means that association is to be, as far as possible, free, voluntary, not compulsory; the functions of government and law are to be minimized. In the second place, freedom means that such politico-legal coercion as is necessary in the interests of order—and hence of maximum freedom itself—is to be "democratic." The



enactment and enforcement of law are the exclusive task of a political order made effectively responsive to the popular will, in the only possible way, namely, by the machinery of representative government and the electoral process.

It is (we repeat) particularly to be emphasized that in modern liberal thought freedom is an ethical value, and not merely instrumental to the end of economic efficiency, as a superficial reading of the literature of utilitarianism often suggests. It is assumed both that human beings, as moral, wish to be free, even at some sacrifice of efficiency, and also, that they *ought* to be free, even against a possible impulse or wish to the contrary. Modern legal systems do not permit the individual to contract himself into servitude either through error or through deliberate choice. The ethical principle of free association was well stated by Herbert Spencer—a thinker whose undoubted limitations currently tend to obscure his sound perceptions. It is the principle that each individual shall have the right to judge and to choose his own ends and the best course of action for realizing them, as long as he does not infringe the similar and equal freedom of others.

## VI

These last remarks suggest the relations of "co-operation," and bring us to what is the most distinctive and in a sense the most fundamental characteristic of modern civilization, namely, the technology, capitalism and large-scale organization of "economic" activity.<sup>6</sup> This is the sphere or aspect of life which naturally comes to mind when we speak of modern problems; for it is in this sphere that those conflicts of interest arise which threaten order and peace, as well as progress. Any rational discussion must first of all clearly recognize that what we mean by "economy" is the effective use of means to realize ends, meaning any ends whatever. There are no distinct economic ends. All purposive activity, including play, is directed towards ends and calls for the use of

<sup>6</sup>The enormous development of organized play and of organized cultural activities is nearly as characteristic of modern society as the organization of "work"—and the lines which separate these categories are extremely vague. One thinks of Greek democracy in this connection. These things should be mentioned because reference to them is so conspicuously absent from New Testament teaching, while their value is so great and so unquestionable in the modern ideal of life. But only bare mention is possible here.

means, a fact completely ignored by primitive Christian teaching; and the significance of activity in realizing value, either in the result or in the activity itself, depends on its efficiency. (Within limits, as always; the qualifications which many of our generalizations call for cannot be noted here.) As we have already emphasized, and as should be evident, the "higher" values, truth and beauty, and their diffusion or sharing, are *especially* dependent upon the use of means; and such values constitute the real difference between a high and a low "standard of living."

In the second place, the modern mind recognizes that in consequence of the given and unalterable conditions of man's life upon the earth one indispensable requisite for even minimum productive efficiency, and hence for any civilized or good life, is specialization, which involves the *organization* of the use of means. Moreover, this organization has to be on a vast scale, especially because of the way in which necessary "raw materials," and climatic conditions controlling the character of production, are distributed over the globe.

Hypothetically, or in imagination at least, economic organization might be carried out and might achieve efficiency and progress under many forms or patterns. In modern history, it actually developed on the pattern called "free enterprise." The reasons cannot be investigated here. It can in fact be shown that *if* human beings conformed to appropriate specifications, and governments likewise—operated by the same or similar men, or by a special race of men, or by angels or Gods—the ends could be even better accomplished under a system of centralized control, i.e. socialism or collectivism. Even pure antinomian anarchism is imaginable, without violating any established law of nature. However, there are very cogent reasons for believing that with men at all as they are—and with governments as they will be, if staffed by such men—neither socialism nor anarchism in any approximation to the ideal pattern is a practical possibility.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Religion is no exception to the principle that it is the higher values which are costly, and illustrates the treacherous relation between our "talk" and what we really admire and strive to do. According to the talk, God is a spirit and is to be worshipped in spirit, even in secret, and in temples not made with hands. In practice, religious people go as far in the opposite direction as they can afford. Moreover, the temples and trappings of religion (including Christianity, especially in its medieval heyday) have often been purchased with wealth obtained in corrupt and dishonorable ways. The costliness of religious practice is connected with the fact that the religious experience is largely esthetic, in a narrow or a broad sense.



With respect to the ethical aspect of organization, one important proposition can be stated as a fact. The enterprise economy, with all the main features of co-operative action worked out through the purchase and sale of goods and services by free individuals, in free markets, on terms (prices) set by market competition, is the only possible method for realizing at the same time the practically infinite gain in efficiency to be had through organization and a reasonable degree of individual freedom in economic life. A socialistic state with any regard for the freedom of the individual must retain the general pattern of the free market organization; and even ignoring personal liberty, the difficulties of administration are insuperable in a large organization without price relations, especially if it is in any degree progressive. The totalitarian states, communistic or nationalistic, keep this general pattern. And even in the most democratic organization, on the scale necessary to utilize modern technology, the infinitesimal voice of the individual in the government would be no compensation for regimentation in the affairs of every-day life.

Under "ideal conditions," described by economic theory—corresponding in a general way to abstraction from friction in theoretical mechanics—the enterprise or market organization also leads to maximum productive efficiency. That is, both total product and the income of every individual are the largest that is possible with the available means and without uncompensated transfers—robbery or gift. This conclusion, however, rests on three important "assumptions": (a) Individuals must know their own interests and act intelligently in their own interest but without exercising coercion of any kind—force or fraud or "over"-persuasion (i.e. any real persuasion, as distinguished from communication of facts); (b) Perfect competition must exist; resources and products must be minutely divisible, and there must be no monopolistic action, either by an individual in a position of power or through collusion between individuals; (c) Transactions between individuals must not substantially affect, either for good or for ill, other individuals whose interests are not represented.

The ethical character of the result is, however, subject to the

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<sup>7</sup>This is a question of political, social and moral facts and principles; it is not a question of economics, in the sense of the subject matter of economics as a recognized special science or discipline. Of course, the revolutionist assumes that "human nature" will be completely different after the inauguration of his scheme; but this proposition does not call for serious consideration.

further reservation that in the mechanical operation of the economy the individual is treated as "given", particularly in his three economic components. These are (1) his wants and (2) his productive capacity, which in turn comprises (2-a) personal endowments, original and acquired, and property owned and (2-b) technique, or knowledge of productive methods. The content of freedom is relative to what one wishes to do and is dependent on the possession of power. In exchange relations, moreover, effective freedom requires power not too far inferior to that possessed by the other party to the transaction; hence freedom implies some limitation on inequality. In any case, the individual cannot possibly be treated as given. For it is a simple fact, not merely that his nature is largely determined by social action, but that determining the character and endowments of the individual members of society is the supreme problem of social policy. It is particularly indefensible in the case of dependent persons to treat economic performance as the measure of individual moral desert, or of socially imperative income. As already hinted, the family is in many respects more real as a social economic unit than is the individual.

Every one of the mechanical conditions listed is likely to be more or less violated by the facts, and to that extent there is occasion for intervention by the state or some other agency, without violating the principle of maximum freedom. In addition, as has always been recognized, social action is called for in many fields where the future of society as a whole is involved, or where the beneficiary at the moment is the community rather than a particular individual, and also where technical conditions lead to "natural" monopoly. (The importance of monopoly as an evil is grossly exaggerated in popular estimation). These considerations map a large area in which market competition needs to be supplemented or modified by other forms of relationship—legal compulsion, or special forms of co-operation, or "charity." There is no implication of *laissez-faire*, but the detailed facts and the action appropriate under each head cannot be taken up in this essay. However, infinitely more important problems of social action arise in connection with the creation or formation of individuals fit for freedom, in economic relations as usually conceived, and in all relations. Christianity and liberalism have both erred in taking individuals too much for granted and viewing moral problems in terms of right relations between given individuals. But while Christian teaching ignored the problem completely, liberalism has



progressively recognized it and sought to provide and to enforce proper training and a reasonable start in life for the young.

## VII

We come finally to the question as to the cause and possible remedy for the dissatisfaction with modern civilization which is so widespread and so acute that it threatens to engulf that civilization and all its achievements in a "holocaust" of destructive conflict. The particular question for us here is the merits of religion as a remedy; but it is proverbial that diagnosis must precede effective treatment. And diagnosis in turn, to continue with the medical figure, must rest on adequate *knowledge* of the anatomy and physiology of the body in which the disease occurs. But knowledge and understanding with a view to action are no part of primitive Christian morality. Indeed, they are implicitly condemned, for they come under the category of means or power, and elementary consistency requires that the Gospel condemnation of wealth be extended to include all forms of power—material means, organization, and intelligence itself.

In connection with remedial action, the medical figure is particularly significant. The history of medicine reveals the striking fact that what "human nature" prompts men to do, to themselves or to others, when they are sick, is predominantly injurious or at best harmless because completely irrelevant. Curative elements in pre-scientific procedure have crept in by some accident, or perhaps by a kind of Darwinian selection of spontaneous variations. And the same pathetic situation is met with in connection with the malfunctioning of the "body politico-economic." Objectivity compels us to admit that "intelligent" procedure, looking at the facts and analyzing them down to principles, and acting in ways which there is some reason to believe will "work", is not at all a natural trait of man, the "romantic fool." Our natural impulses, even (perhaps especially!) where our intentions are good, run toward finding somebody, a supernatural entity, or preferably some human individual or group, to *blame* for anything that seems to be wrong, and to proceed by way of magical coercion, or by punishment, or "liquidation." This may not seem to be a natural consequence of Christianity, but as will presently appear such is very largely the case—if modern religious and moral attitudes are derived from Christian teachings.

In any event, no other action which seems to be a more natural or proper expression of love for individual human beings (or for God) is likely to be more effective, or much less disastrous. Let anyone reflect as to how far love will carry us toward a solution of the problem of money, the business cycle and unemployment! Economic depression profits practically no one, hence it cannot be due to exploitation; but it is the main source or center of the whole culture crisis, including the war. However, it is all this chiefly because of the kind of remedies which are proposed and tried—beginning with war or perhaps ending with it.

The conclusions of the preceding section, which contain in substance the correct diagnosis of our economic ills, and indicate the lines along which curative action must proceed, follow from quite simple analysis, familiar to any fairly competent student of elementary economics. Of course the content of that discipline cannot be recapitulated here. The most important principles are not really economic in any special or scientific sense, but are at the level of simple arithmetic. A society cannot (in any moderately "long run") distribute or consume more than it produces, or have more by producing less. Yet exactly this is the obvious effect, if not the direct intention, of the measures which are typically advocated by "reformers," on moral and religious grounds, for alleviating poverty, whether by reducing inequality or by increasing economic prosperity—specifically in the United States of America at the date of this writing. Any such remedies can only be destructive of progress and ultimately of civilization.\* Since free exchange must benefit both parties, it follows that any arbitrary dictation of any price, against free market forces (apart from force and fraud and monopoly), must injure both parties; and this applies specifically to the price of labor.

Two anomalies in particular are so outstanding as to appeal to any well-developed sense of humor. The first is the destruction of intellectual morality by the primitive natural prejudice already referred to. One of the most favored lines of action for alleviating poverty is to force employers to raise wages, without reference to the economic value of the service for which wages are paid, as judged by the ultimate consumer of the product. Most of those who advocate this remedy actually know quite well that employ-

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\*Renunciation of improvement, of progress, is not enough. Civilized life even at low levels will not even keep going without thought-taking of the same kind as that required for melioristic action; and it is doubtful whether civilization could exist without progress.

ers cannot pay for services (on any general scale) more than this value, which effective market competition will force them to pay, without coercion. Forcing them to pay more must reduce production and employment. They know that employers in general have extremely little margin of discretion as to what wages they can pay and continue in business, and more specifically, that the particular employers who pay the lower wages are typically already bankrupt or on the edge of bankruptcy. As to the argument that in reality perfect competition is not present, the answer is that of course it is not, but that—apart from the gross exaggeration of the role of monopoly in the popular mind—this fact strengthens the argument against this kind of interference. In general, the “monopolistic” employers already pay the higher wages; and to force them to pay still more to their particular employees would be a palpable injustice to those less well paid and would produce new evils without curing the old.

The second anomaly is that such remedies should be advocated on the basis of “Christian” principles. This is clearly the antithesis of preaching the spiritual value of poverty, non-resistance to evil, and love of one’s enemies. But the preachers of Christianity, and churches in their organized capacity, typically advocate both recourse to force and the use of force in ways certain to aggravate the evils, and in particular to injure the persons the measures are particularly intended to benefit. The limit of this tendency is “Christian Marxism,” which, in spite of the contradiction involved, is a natural position, and quite logical. Love of the downtrodden seems a mockery if it does not lead to action on their behalf, which is naturally taken to mean liquidation of their oppressors. “Preaching at” employers and men of wealth along the same lines, or appealing to them in terms of “love” is better only in that it is relatively innocuous. But it is vicious in so far as it distracts attention from rational analysis and the discovery and application of effective procedures.

## VIII

In the scope of an article, though overlong, it has been impossible to treat our topic fully. We hope enough has been said to show that the issues in modern civilization present intellectual problems, and cannot be fruitfully attacked in terms of the ethics of love, or any



sentimental-personal morality. And this should indicate the type of religion and morality which are called for in order to develop civilization and forestall reversion to primitive savagery. Again, the comparison with individual medicine is profoundly illuminating up to a certain point. Effective medical practice depends upon science and workmanship; very much "love," or even sympathy for the suffering individual, is a serious obstruction to effective practice, a natural disposition which must be rationally repressed in favor of a highly sophisticated interest in science and craftsmanship. Of course, this does not mean that the doctor is not motivated by ethical ideals which have some ultimate relation to love of humanity—perhaps also to love of God, or at least to "religion." If more religious faith can create a greater degree of serenity and confidence, without sapping the spring of action, that is a consummation devoutly to be wished, both on its own account and as a condition favorable to effective action itself. But this does not mean that sound ideals can be identified with religious ideals, without a fundamental redefinition of the latter. *It is imperative to understand the relation between morality and intelligence, and the provision of adequate means.* The relation is one of complementarity. Development of any one of these three requisites for the good life calls for a corresponding development of both of the others, or the result will be evil rather than good. "True religion," we submit, is a matter of the right emotional attitude toward the problem as a whole, and an energizing faith that study and rationally directed effort will lead progressively toward its solution. Some of our liberal churches and ministers are undoubtedly working toward such an ideal.

On the other hand, our statement that the problems are intellectual must not be understood as implying that they are "scientific" problems. Undoubtedly, an excessive faith in science and in the application of scientific categories to moral and social problems, where they have no application, has been one of the important factors leading up to the present crisis—far more important than excessive religiosity. Science and technology tell us how to do, but never what to do. Individual medicine itself is "scientific" only to the extent that men agree on the meaning of health and disease (in reality further qualified by the mental factor). In this field, the degree of agreement which is practically requisite may be taken for granted. In "social medicine," the case is distinctly to the contrary; the main problem in realizing social

health is that of defining it, of agreeing as to what is to be striven for. The nature of ideal society is at once a moral and an intellectual problem. It is the general problem of values, in which the two modes of reality meet, existence and purpose. Science and religion both involve a high and an austere ethic. But neither of them is directly relative to political problems; neither is an ethic of organized relationships. Scientific ethics is the grosser error, at least when science refuses to recognize that its own foundations and presuppositions are moral-evaluative, an impersonal devotion to objective truth, as against any selfish, or sentimental, interest.\*

Finally, the practical problem of achieving any defined conception of a "healthy" (or an "ideal") society is still not a scientific or a technical one in the proper, instrumentalist sense. To begin with, it is the very different kind of problem involved in formulating, which means rationally agreeing upon, "rules of the game," which is not a matter of means and end. But right rules, in the sense of right relations between given individuals, is still a comparatively minor aspect of the problem. The major task is that of progressively creating "right" individuals, which in itself means a right cultural situation, one in which freedom, order, and efficiency are simultaneously possible to the highest degree. More concretely, the objective is such a society, made up of such men, that the individual can be trusted with freedom, meaning that he can be trusted with the *power* which is necessary to give freedom substantial content. Meanwhile, the issue lies between trusting men with freedom, and with the power over others which in organized society is inseparable from freedom, and trusting some small group of men with supreme power to govern, and to change, all others.

The greatest tragedy of the situation is that freedom has led men to conceive of their "rights" in terms which enormously overlap, and far surpass possibility, and that conflict of rights, while it is the only discussible form of conflict, is far more serious than conflict of interests. Only as rights can interests be discussed; interests are asserted, not argued, except as values, i.e. judgments about values. And discussion is the only way in which problems of conflict are really "solved;" force, which includes persuasion,

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\*Science is a close approximation to the pure type of democracy, free individual co-operation or "anarchy," settling all issues intellectually, by discussion.

yields no real solution of any problem. Yet in the discussion of rights, the very notion of their sanctity tends to result in an appeal from discussion to force.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Explicit mention should be made of international relations, especially since the immediate threat to civilization comes from war. It goes without saying that no country or nation can solve its problems or save itself alone. Some effective political world order is indispensable. But, as prohibition of usury, now recognized as a stupid policy, was the dominant principle of Christian economics in the Middle Ages, the most conspicuous result fairly attributable to Christian teachings in modern Western society would seem to be that "pacifism" which has made the peace-loving peoples so helpless and at the mercy of those who frankly worship force.

Social-ethical problems not centering in economic organization have had to be passed over here because of space limits. The general notion of "purity," for example, occupies a large place in moral ideas, from the most primitive beginnings, and it is not implied that "morals," in the meaning conveyed by the quotation marks, do not present an important problem in modern society.



# Reinhold Niebuhr: From Detroit to Edinburgh

ELIZABETH PAXTON LAM

## I.

The publication by Niebuhr of the first volume<sup>1</sup> of his Gifford lectures in Edinburgh is an event of unusual significance. This volume, which deals primarily with his views of human nature, is to be followed within a few months by the second volume, entitled *Human Destiny*. These will undoubtedly be viewed as a landmark in the history of American theology. Truth, as Alfred North Whitehead once wrote, must be freshly caught, like fish. The age-old doctrines about God, sin, man, redemption, and salvation come alive, and he who reads must catch the contemporary relevance of Niebuhr's theology. Forged against the background of world catastrophe, his message rings with the authority of truth as ancient as Israel's prophets and as new as the headlines in the morning paper. For all its biblical and Christian footage, however, this volume could not have come out of an earlier century. It has the impress of realism and truth because it bears evidence of grappling with issues which today mar and tear the souls and bodies of men. For this reason it turns penetrating illumination upon the chaotic and dark events of our day. It gives meaning and majesty to human enterprises even at this moment when history looks most hopeless.

Students and critics of Niebuhr will welcome this volume especially, because it throws into new perspective his previous writings. It is now possible to see these in relation to one another, and, what is more important, in relation to their theological frame of reference. His writings have often left readers puzzled or confused. This is due in part to the methods he has used in setting forth his ideas. In stating his own position he has depended primarily upon negating, denying, or criticizing viewpoints, or schools of thought different from his own. As a consequence the reader has at times had a clearer conception of the ideas which Niebuhr has negated than of those which he has affirmed. This is particularly true with regard to his theological premises. Perhaps they were lacking in clarity because he himself had not worked out his own positive thought. Of his latest publication, however, this criticism can no longer be made.

As Niebuhr himself has said, his thinking has developed from

<sup>1</sup>*The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Volume I., *Human Nature*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1941. 306 pp. \$2.75.

socio-ethical criticism to theological interpretation.<sup>2</sup> His first pastorate was in Detroit, a center of large scale industry. There he was able to observe firsthand the tensions, conflicts and injustices of our productive system. His primary concern was ethical. Stung by the sharp disparity and apparent futility of Christian ethics in relation to these problems, he was led to ask *Does Civilization Need Religion?*<sup>3</sup> In this, his first book, he raised the question as to how Christianity can help to solve the problems of man's aggregate existence under modern industrialism. Probing more deeply into why these problems exist, Niebuhr turned to sociological analysis. *Moral Man and Immoral Society*<sup>4</sup> lays stress upon the inherent characteristics of collective life. *The Interpretation of Christian Ethics*<sup>5</sup> points up the sharp antithesis between the Christian ethics of love and the stubborn and resistant evils of man in the aggregate. From socio-ethical analysis Niebuhr moved into problems of historical interpretation. *Reflections on the End of an Era*<sup>6</sup> and *Beyond Tragedy*<sup>7</sup> place in a vaster setting the issues of our age. The increasing emphasis upon the theological implications of these questions culminates in the profound treatise on human nature. We shall review briefly these developments in Niebuhr's thought.

## II.

The crucial issue of our day Niebuhr has consistently maintained is that of economic justice. His analysis of the problem is made in Marxian terms.<sup>8</sup> The vast wealth created by our industrial economy has steadily widened the gulf between the owners of production and the workers: the owners become richer at the expense of the workers who become increasingly poorer. Our capitalistic economy, moreover, has condemned workers to monotonous, tedious toil; it has crowded them into tenement houses and deprived them and their families of wholesome living.<sup>9</sup> As

<sup>2</sup>*Christian Century*, "Ten Years That Shook My World," April 26, 1939.

<sup>3</sup>*Does Civilization Need Religion?* New York: Macmillan, 1927.

<sup>4</sup>*Moral Man and Immoral Society*. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1932.

<sup>5</sup>*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*. New York: Harper, 1932.

<sup>6</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*. New York: Scribner's, 1934.

<sup>7</sup>*Beyond Tragedy*. New York: Scribner's, 1937.

<sup>8</sup>Niebuhr's debt to Marx is frequently acknowledged. See, for example, *Christian Ethics*, pp. 184-185; "Marx, Barth and Israel's Prophets," *Christian Century*, January 30, 1935; *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Chapter VI. Niebuhr accepts Marx's economic analysis of our productive system. This does not mean, of course, that he follows the entire system of Marx.

<sup>9</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*, pp. 100 ff.

economic relationships have become increasingly complex, human relationships have become mechanical and impersonal. Capitalism which has connected people by a thousand economic bonds has not related them to one another organically. Imperialism and the exploitation of backward peoples have taken place in the name of profits; the human values at stake have been ignored. Man has mastered the machine only in turn to become its slave. And since he is not able to distribute the vast wealth which the machine has created,<sup>10</sup> periods of crisis, depression, and human misery result. The uneven distribution of wealth on a world scale has contributed to international conflict.

This statement of the problem is not new. Other Christian critics share Niebuhr's indictment of our civilization as thus far outlined. But his explanation as to why these social evils have arisen and why they defy moral and rational means of control is distinctive. Here again Niebuhr admits his debt to Marx. It is futile, he says, to assume that social injustice can be overcome by making greedy or selfish men good or reasonable. Social injustice must be attacked in terms of a productive system which gives rise to conflicting social classes, "divergent in interest, ethos, and political purpose."<sup>11</sup> He follows Marx in holding that the gulf separating the working classes and the owning classes can never be bridged by an increase in wages. This would never equalize the differences in the bargaining power of these two economic groups. Consequently, their antagonisms can never be dissolved as long as we have a system of free enterprise, dependent upon profits for motivation.

This conflict of competing economic groups comes to a focus in the contest for political control. In this struggle the state is not impartial or neutral. Because of the unequal economic means of the two groups, the economically privileged are able to bend the state to their own purposes. The suppression of strikes by state militia, the inequalities in taxation, and the intimidation of trades union organizers are indicative of the covert political control of owners of production. Niebuhr admits that there is the possibility of a degree of impartiality in the democratic process, but he holds that this is not sufficient to make the state impartial in the struggle for economic justice.

This analysis of socio-ethical problems is substantiated by ad-

<sup>10</sup>*Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*, p. 157.



ditional sociological data. Social conflict arises not merely because of our productive system. It springs from the fact that men "naturally" aggregate into groups, and that these associations inevitably come into competition with each other for mutually exclusive values. At times the antagonism is covert and concealed beneath the surface harmonies of the social order; at other times, it breaks out into overt forms—strikes, revolution, and war. This antagonistic relationship inherent in the interaction of collectivities is for Niebuhr the clue to any understanding of our society. The following factors account for its increasing intensity in modern civilization.<sup>12</sup>

First, due to the increasing complexity of modern life, secondary groups are increasing in size. In order to achieve inner group solidarity under these conditions, it is necessary for the "we-group" to project an enemy group. There must be a scape-goat. Thus the development of unity and *esprit de corps* within the group is tied to inter-group competition, rivalry, and conflict. This is true, for example, of labor unions which gain in solidarity in times of industrial crisis. It is true of Germany under Hitler—a united ethno-centric Germany has gone hand in hand with Jewish persecution and conquest.

Secondly, secondary groups are fertile soil for the operation of mob psychology. Passions and prejudices due to modern means of communication spread rapidly from one person to another. Tremendous pressures are put upon the individual to conform. Reflective thinking is reduced to the minimum. The forces of irrationality are here in control. Those who do not conform find themselves excommunicated or in concentration camps.

Thirdly, these characteristics of group relationships have given rise to a dual standard of morality—one for the individual and one for the group. "Thou shalt not kill" is a controlling imperative with ethical and religious sanctions in face-to-face situations; on the international boundary, "Thou shalt kill" becomes law. "He who would be great among you must be the servant of all" is at least an accepted ideal for the family and the local neighborhood; but when thought of in terms of Japanese-American relationships or the struggle of capital and labor, it becomes an absurdity. There is no restraining public opinion to control the egotism of the group. The nation or the class evokes loyalty on

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<sup>12</sup>These are discussed in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*.

the basis of the unquestioned rightness of its aims. Right is *in* the action of the state; it does not exist as a standard by which to judge the action of the state. Consequently, the frustrated desires of individuals, which are restrained in relation to other individuals, are allowed full vent in the unethical practices of the class or nation. Private vices thus become public virtues.

And, finally, the more inclusive the group the greater is the temptation to identify the aims of the particular group with universal values. Both Germany and the Allies, for example, claimed to be fighting for a world civilization in World War I. Unwilling to admit its own greed and will-to-power any collectivity unconsciously conceals the self-interest of its purposes by ideals which transcend its narrow interests and perspective. The problem, therefore, is to find within our cultural milieu an objective perspective to transcend conflicting interests and to furnish the basis for an impartial consideration of group relationships.<sup>13</sup>

By thus focusing upon group conflict, Niebuhr is raising for primary consideration two aspects of social relationships neglected by liberal democratic theory. In contrast to liberalism, which is centered around the individual—his inherent worth, his welfare, and his role in democratic processes of government, Niebuhr focuses upon the group or collectivity. He asserts that it is not the individual who determines the structure of society. Secondary groups such as the class, the nation, the labor union, or the corporation constitute the ultimate or final sociological units. These determine the nature of the social order and, through their interaction, the outcome of political struggles.<sup>14</sup> By elevating the collectivity to a place of final importance, Niebuhr reduces the importance of the individual in social processes. This approach to the study of society through the collectivity leads him to conclusions regarding the state, democratic methods of change, and education which are fundamentally at variance with liberal theory. These differences we shall discuss after noting the second aspect of sociological phenomena which Niebuhr stresses.

<sup>13</sup>Niebuhr's treatment of the Marxist concept of ideology deserves more adequate discussion than this incidental reference. His development of Marx's insight is highly significant, and has especial importance in his theology. For discussion of this see *The Nation*, "Ideology and Pretense," December 19, 1939; *Theology*, "Christian Faith and Natural Law," February, 1940; *Christian Ethics*, pp. 123 ff.; *Human Nature*, pp. 46 ff., 182, 194-198.

<sup>14</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*, p. 160.

Liberalism points with pride and confidence to the degree of order or stability that societal man has been able to achieve. It stresses what men agree upon, and what they share in common. It assumes that individual men can be taught to identify their own welfare with the good of the whole society, and that out of such identification of interests the welfare of all is promoted. The emphasis is upon the efficacy of reason to achieve these mutually beneficial ends, and upon the social stability that sustains such efforts. Liberalism is led, therefore, to minimize the conflict or the irrational elements in society. Niebuhr's starting point is not the individual, but the group. His emphasis, accordingly, is upon the distinctive characteristics of group relationships, namely conflict and irrationality. Instead of seeking to account for the cohesive rational forces which make for stability and mutuality, Niebuhr concentrates upon the antagonisms and irrationalities.<sup>15</sup> Until we understand the potentially volcanic or destructive nature of these forces which set groups in conflict, Niebuhr contends, we cannot understand our world.

### III.

These sociological assumptions present to Christian ethics a knotty problem. In the face of ineradicable forces of conflict and antagonism, how can justice be achieved without making use of these very forces which the Christian conscience of man condemns as evil? Christians have made two wrong approaches to this dilemma. Orthodox Christianity, with its otherworldly orientation, has condemned this world as evil, and withdrawn from the arena of political combat. Its attention has been centered on the salvation of individual souls. Liberal Christianity, with its stress upon the immanence of God in history, has been blinded to the full recognition of evil in collective interaction, and consequently has not faced squarely the issue of power politics. It has optimistically attacked social ills by appeal to love and cooperation. One group of Christians has avoided the issue; the other has virtually denied its existence.

The test of any moral or religious world-view is in its handling

<sup>15</sup>For example, Niebuhr states ". . . collective enterprises belong to the order of nature, more than to the order of reason." (*Reflections on the End of an Era*, p. 31.) And again, ". . . the collective life of man moves by impulse rather than reason," (*Ibid.*, p. 34.)



of this question, holds Niebuhr.<sup>16</sup> His solution is well known. Evil must be used to eradicate evil. The use of violence and coercion cannot be avoided in the establishment of a more just social order. His arguments in justification of this method may be roughly classified into three kinds.

The first one is primarily sociological. The mechanical nature of our civilization prevents the possibility of one social group possessing all the facts or appreciating all the feelings which actuate another group. Partial achievements have come through democratic processes,<sup>17</sup> but these will never be instrumental in making the transition to a different economic system. Niebuhr is forced, therefore, to take the position of a revolutionist, sociologically speaking. A reformer relies upon accepted methods of institutional change to bring about his objectives: individual moral development, religious conversion, education, legislative enactments, or judicial interpretations. A revolutionist is one whose criticism of the existing order is so fundamental that these very institutions are viewed as inadequate instruments of the change desired. To Niebuhr the existing institutions, the state, the educational system, and the church, are so tied to the present productive system that they do not offer hope for a successful non-violent transition to a new and better society. Niebuhr, therefore, turns to coercion as the only weapon left to forge a more just society.

His pragmatic argument may be briefly summarized. "... the whole of society is constantly involved in both coercion and violence."<sup>18</sup> It is necessary to meet force with force, coercion with coercion. Realism demands that these jungle-like characteristics be recognized and accepted. Whether the use of violence is ethically justified depends upon the ends for which the force is used. Since justice is "the most rational ultimate objective for society," taking precedence certainly over the preservation of privilege and over the values of a superficial peace, revolutionary tactics have a justification not enjoyed by the government's coercive measures.<sup>19</sup> Niebuhr concludes, "A social conflict which aims at the elimination of those injustices is in a different category from one which is carried on without reference to the problem of justice."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*, p. 209; cf. also *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Introduction.

<sup>17</sup>*Moral Man and Immoral Society*, pp. 206 ff.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>19</sup>*Moral Man and Immoral Society*, pp. 234-235; *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 196.

Once the ethical superiority of the objective is granted, "the choice of means in fulfilling the purpose raises pragmatic issues which are more political than ethical."<sup>21</sup> The question reduces itself to the province of strategy.

"If a season of violence can establish a just social system and can create the possibilities of its preservation, there is no purely ethical ground upon which violence and revolution can be ruled out. This could be done only upon the basis of purely anarchistic, ethical and political presuppositions. Once we have made the fateful concession of ethics to politics, and accepted coercion as a necessary instrument of social cohesion, we can make no distinction between non-violent and violent types of coercion and between coercion used by governments and that which is used by revolutionaries. If such distinctions are made they must be judged in terms of the consequences in which they result."<sup>22</sup>

There is no certainty of success, Niebuhr recognizes. But he is willing nevertheless to run the risks and to accept the chances for a good outcome.

Niebuhr presents a more philosophical refutation of pacifism in later writings.<sup>23</sup> Man in any given historical situation must deal with sociological "realities" if he is to make an effective moral decision. These, as Niebuhr defines them, mean the elements of conflict inherent in socio-political processes. From the Christian viewpoint, consequently, any political decision is a choice between evils, and not a choice between good and evil. Judgment cannot be made, therefore, upon the alternatives of cooperation and love on the one hand and of violence and evil on the other. There is no possibility of cooperation and love in the political issues under discussion. The pacifist, who so defines the situation, is injecting an ideal of perfectionism which is irrelevant to the actual issues at stake. For practical purposes, consequently, his decision amounts to a negation of any effective control of political direction. He throws the weight of his influence on the side of anarchy. This argument pushes Niebuhr at once into the larger categories of historical necessity. This we shall discuss under the next heading, Niebuhr's philosophy of history.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>*Moral Man and Immoral Society*, p. 192.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 179-180.

<sup>23</sup>*Christianity and Power Politics*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1940. Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup>These arguments in support of violence are open to serious question. The pragmatic justification of the use of coercion raises the question of the divorce of ends and means. This Niebuhr has not adequately treated. The third argument also deserves scrutiny in terms of the sociological assumptions upon which it is based. If these be statements of "fact," then Niebuhr's conclusions are irrefutable. But if his analysis of the "given" socio-

## IV.

When the element of time is injected into the questions of social change, we have moved from ethics to a philosophy of history. The rise and rapid spread of fascism forced Niebuhr to think in terms of the sweep and purposes of world movements. In his interpretative writings, we find him wrestling, but from a different perspective, with the same problems of irrationality, social instability, and conflict. Consequently, he lays down certain criteria<sup>25</sup> which a philosophy of history should meet: (1) Does it come to grips with the limitations imposed upon human choice by the nature of group interaction? (2) Does it take into account the catastrophic element in history? (3) Does it find meaning in history in spite of social chaos?

The first of these we should anticipate in the light of Niebuhr's sociological premises. History presents man with only limited alternatives of action. These constitute the "historical necessities" or contingencies of his collective existence. Niebuhr speaks repeatedly of the "logic of history" and of "inevitable goals."<sup>26</sup> His meaning is not always clear. From the general context of his writings, we may interpret him to mean that in a given historical situation, there are limited alternatives. In more specific terms, our civilization is faced with the choice of a reconstructed economic system of greater justice or of destruction.

The second criterion, namely the apocalyptic note of catastrophe, stands in sharp contrast to liberal theories of progress. These, as we know, have pictured history as moving inevitably toward a higher type of social life. Niebuhr sets himself squarely against any such notion of social evolution. There is no gradual overcoming of evil by good. Both good and evil increase; an ever-expanding cosmos has as its concomitant ever increasing possibilities of chaos. "The fabric of history is woven upon a loom which has greater dimensions than any known history. No simple victory of good over evil in history is possible. Every new energy of life and every higher creative force can be, and will be, a force of disintegration as well as of integration."<sup>27</sup>

logical data be open to different interpretation, then these historical "realities" may offer other possible courses of action than those which involve the use of violence.

<sup>25</sup>*Reflections on the End of an Era*, pp. 122 ff.

<sup>26</sup>For example, *Ibid.*, p. 148.



If history be involved in the contradiction of good and evil, what meaning does it have? His premises refute the hopes of nineteenth century liberalism that the good society can be built in England's green fields, or any other green fields. His persistent, stubborn effort to wring meaning out of the occurrences of daily life keep him from an other-worldly view, which looks for meaning in some eternal realm above the vicissitudes of time. Niebuhr takes a dialectical position. History does have meaning, but this is to be found not on the horizontal line of men's relations to one another, but on the vertical line between man and God. Man's moral efforts will never bring in the Kingdom of God; man's achievements, even the highest, will have in them the sin of pride and self-interest. Only God therefore in his grace can dissolve the contradictions in history and fulfill its meaning. This conception is difficult to grasp. We must bear in mind what Niebuhr is seeking to preserve. Against those who view the world as evil and therefore abandon it to the devil, Niebuhr maintains that human creativity is possible and good. It is not the world which is evil, but man's wrong use of his freedom. This view prevents any Neo-Platonic retreat to an eternal realm disconnected with time and human endeavor. Against those who maintain that human endeavor is good and that the Kingdom of God is immanent and growing in history, Niebuhr holds that even man's highest endeavors are sinful. Consequently the Kingdom of God must be something other than man's moral achievements.<sup>28</sup>

The Kingdom of God always exists as a realm of judgment upon men; it compels them to see themselves as *species sub aeternitate*. This judgment appears in whatever catastrophe brings recognition of dependence upon God as the ultimate carrier of the human enterprise. Such acknowledgment means repentance, and out of this experience, through the grace of God, comes forgiveness and salvation. Thus "the grace of God for man and the Kingdom of God for history are both divine realities and not human possibilities."<sup>29</sup>

In this interpretation of man's ultimate destiny we need to

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<sup>27</sup>*Beyond Tragedy*, pp. 145-6; cf. also p. 191; *Christianity and Power Politics*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup>*Christian Century*, "Marx, Barth, and Israel's Prophets," January 30, 1935.

<sup>29</sup>*Christianity and Power Politics*, p. 21.

point out that Niebuhr sees no hope for collective salvation "for the very reason that it offers men the very symbols of pseudo-universality which tempt them to glorify and worship themselves as God."<sup>30</sup> Consequently, "the ground of our hope lies not in human capacity but in divine power and mercy, in the character of the ultimate reality, which carries the human enterprise. This hope does not imply that fulfillment means the negation of what is established and developed in human history. . . . The fulfillment is neither a negation of its essential character nor yet a further development of its own inherent capacities. It is rather a completion of its essence by an annihilation of the contradictions which man has introduced into human life."<sup>31</sup>

## V.

It is evident that Niebuhr presents the problems of social ethics and history in terms of paradoxes. He has placed in dialectical juxtaposition (1) an ethic of perfectionism and ineradicable conflict; (2) the individual and the group; (3) necessity and freedom; (4) the chaos and the meaningfulness of history. In the Hafford Lectures (Volume I.) he seeks to demonstrate that it is only from the perspective of Christian thought that one dares face the full implications of these antitheses. He reviews the systems of philosophy, idealistic, materialistic, and naturalistic, which have taken hold of one or the other pole of these dialectic theses. Each of these solutions that loosen or eliminate the tension between the opposing poles, is analyzed and found inadequate to the full meaning of the issues. He ably demonstrates that any attempt to reduce them to either pole of the dialectic ends in a *cul-de-sac* which leaves the other half of the problem unexplained. These issues are pushed beyond mere academic discussion to the point where their immediate relevance for the modern individual, seeking to understand himself and his world, becomes evident. We shall not attempt to review the refutations of these philosophic positions. These are live issues which Niebuhr handles with originality and thoroughness. For our purposes, however, we shall dig at once into Niebuhr's own treatment of these paradoxes from the viewpoint of their existential meaning.

By probing more deeply into the cause of social injustice and conflict Niebuhr pushes man to define his ethical problems in

<sup>30</sup> *Christian Ethics*, p. 89.

<sup>31</sup> *Beyond Tragedy*, p. 24.

terms of his relation to God. From this perspective the tension between Christian ethics and man's moral efforts becomes eternally inevitable. The greed and injustice of capitalism and the irrationalities of group interaction arise not because of the system of socio-economic arrangements, but because man is human. The causes of these social evils can be understood only when man comes to terms with the full dimensions of his own nature. Man lives in the world, but he is not wholly of the world. He spends his existence on a borderline which is contiguous with time and eternity. He is a creature of animal vitality and spiritual yearnings. This position, unique in the universe, gives him a sense of cosmic insecurity. Because in the very depths of his being he lacks security and inner poise, he seeks escapes and "false securities." Material possessions are accumulated to give status and security, but there is always the uneasy feeling that at any moment, like the man in the parable who built a great barn, he may be called to account. Or he may seek a place for himself by dominating other men. But such quest for power only results in a more acute sense of isolation which in turn leads to greater domination and hence greater insecurity.

Any observation, furthermore, discloses that wealth, social position, and political control are subject to the vicissitudes of history. He who has seen kings and queens, financial "barons," ministers and presidents topple knows that these high positions are as frail reeds before the impact of historical changes. The individual, consequently, has lost any sense of his own significance or place in the universe. His individuality is swallowed up in the vast impersonal complexities of history.<sup>43</sup>

There are other avenues of escape. If one cannot find a meaningful and secure existence for himself as an individual, then identification with a group having inclusive aims may offer salvation. Thus collectivities, more especially the nation, which represent pseudo-eternal values, are turned to as security. By identification of the self with the nation, the sense of personal futility finds compensation. The nation on its own part claims to be worthy of man's highest devotion. In this claim, "human pride and self-assertion reach their ultimate form and seek to break all bounds of finiteness." . . . "Collective pride is thus man's last,

<sup>43</sup>Niebuhr points out that this is a strange conclusion to the modern age which began in the Renaissance by affirming the uniqueness and significance of the individual.



and in some respects his most pathetic, effort to deny the determinate and contingent character of his existence."<sup>83</sup>

None of these efforts, Niebuhr holds, really faces the issue of man's existence. Material possessions, political power, manifest national destiny, are false saviors which cannot save. They do not offer release from man's self-centeredness and his cosmic insecurity. Man in his capacity for self-deception has concealed the fact that the claims of collectivities are but extensions of his own self-interest. The price paid for this obsession with self and pre-eminence is an uneasy conscience and brooding anxiety. This inner inquietude, which modern man is not able to shake off, is the unmistakable symptom that he is psychologically ill. In theological language, it is a manifestation of God's judgment upon his sin of pride and egotism. The very fact that he is not conscious of his estrangement from God is his final sin.

The collectivity, whether it be a nation or a class, must likewise reckon with the judgment of God. "The most obvious meaning of history is that every nation, culture and civilization brings destruction upon itself by exceeding the bounds of creatureliness which God has set upon all human enterprises."<sup>84</sup> Thus war and strife are catastrophes which inevitably follow the defiance of God as the centre and source of life.

But judgment is not the final word of God. Once man becomes conscious of his self-deception and admits his creatureliness and sinfulness the way is open for forgiveness. Only through the experience of repentance and submission to God can man recover his individuality, and his capacity for creativity. With genuine self-transcendence in his devotion to God comes release from anxiety and inner conflict. Trust in God's providence makes tolerable and acceptable the uncertainties and insecurities of his existence, and frees the self from anxious concern for its own destiny. Love and faith in God, moreover, become the threshold to security in man's relation to man, for only through the grace of God can man fully release his creative initiative in the building of a community wherein free men understand and love one another.

It is at this point that we can restate the paradox of freedom and necessity. Man, with the recovery of his essential individuality

<sup>83</sup>*Human Nature*, p. 212-213.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 140.

and the realization of the full dimension of his nature, is free—free to meet his God and in that encounter to find himself and his destiny. But, at the same time, he is bound inextricably to the world of events and of time. He stands both outside history and within history. In the nexus of socio-economic relationships his freedom is limited by the alternatives which these present. In the vertical line between God and man he is free to become a child of God. Consequently, man has less freedom in the control of his social destiny than he had supposed, and more freedom in his essential nature than he had been willing to admit.

This interpretation of man's relation to God throws new light upon the paradox of ethical action and social evil. All collectivities are sinful, but all are not equally guilty. If there be within the nation or the class individuals receptive to the judgment of God, and if the nation or collectivity does not destroy those who express this judgment, that collectivity may be judged less guilty in the sight of God.<sup>85</sup> This constitutes the last criterion of Niebuhr's for moral decision.

And, finally, Niebuhr's theology makes interdependent the individual and the historical revelation of God. "Without the public and historical revelation the private experience of God would be subject to caprice. Without the private revelation of God, the public and historical revelation would not gain credence."<sup>86</sup>

The writer is cognizant that this presentation has not done justice to the richness of Niebuhr's total thought. There are qualifying ideas, details of pertinent interest, and a diversity of illustrative material which have been omitted. One question of primary importance has not been included, the implications for theology of the concept of ideology. It is with regret that this has been introduced in this article only incidentally. Many of his ideas are highly controversial, deserving careful criticism and further investigation. His epistemological assumptions, for example, are not clear. His sociological premises and his ethical justification of violence are open to question. This article has not attempted a critical handling of these issues. It has aimed instead to present the progression of Niebuhr's thinking "from Detroit to Edinburgh," and thus to show the relation of his ethical criticism to his theology.

<sup>85</sup>This is the basis of Niebuhr's distinction between the guilt of contemporary England and that of Nazi Germany.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 127.

# The Place of Mystery and Silence in Worship

A Comparative Study of Rudolph Otto and Robert Will

PRESCOTT B. WINTERSTEEN

For anyone interested in the problem of enriching Protestant worship without forsaking the Protestant and evangelical emphasis, the studies and experiments of the late Professor Rudolf Otto, of Marburg, and of Professor Robert Will, of Strasbourg, are most helpful. Their view is that this end must be achieved by vitalizing the traditional forms through the introduction of Mystery and Silence into worship. A summary presentation of their proposals follows.

PROFESSOR OTTO

In 1925 Otto published a monograph entitled *Zur Erneuerung und Ausgestaltung des Gottesdienstes (For the Enrichment and Perfection of Divine Worship)*, in which he made certain suggestions. Most closely pertaining to our subject were these two. First, he said that there is a need of Christian lyrics: hymns of consecration, reflection, contemplation, introspection: hymns that will enrich the inner life and bring us to the very height of spiritual utterance—to quietude! And second, he suggested that provision should be made for a period of silence at the close of a religious service, which would be the peak and climax of worship. Otto recognized that Protestantism is the Church of the Word and insisted that so it must remain. The priest must not replace the preacher. And yet, he thought, it would be desirable to reduce the duration of the preaching in favor of combining preaching service and prayer service. His model Order of Service, accordingly, follows this pattern:

Part I. The Proclamation of the Word (*i.e.*, the preaching service), culminating in the sermon.

Part II. The Pause, or Intermission, for the presentation of offerings, private intercessions, announcements.

Part II. The Adoration, a devotional service of antiphonal chanting and devotional readings, culminating in the *Sacrament of Silence*.

The Sacrament of Silence is the most distinctive feature of Otto's service. It is the supreme moment when the "Wholly



Other" shall invade the presence of the worshipers, bringing to them an experience of mystery, awe, and beatitude.

*"Still-born Silence, thou that art  
Flood-gate of the deeper heart"—*

Convinced that the Quaker silence is the most spiritual form of divine service which has ever been practised and that it contains an element which no form of worship ought to be without, yet which is unduly neglected in our Protestant devotional life, Professor Otto maintained we must follow the Quaker example in its use and thereby restore to our divine service a spirit of consecration whose loss has cost us dearly.<sup>1</sup> He proposed devotional silence of a three-fold character: (1) the numinous silence of Sacrament; (2) the silence of Waiting; (3) the silence of Union or Fellowship. These three divisions are described as follows:

(1) The numinous silence of Sacrament

- a. This is the culminating sacramental moment in worship, *numen praesens*, God in the midst.
- b. The preceding part of the service is a preparation for this. The Insufficient here becomes Event. Such a realization is sacrament, and that which occasions, attends, prepares for it must be termed sacramental.
- c. This numinous silence of Sacrament is found in the forms of worship of ancient Israel and today in the Roman Mass, in the moment of "transubstantiation."

(2) The silence of Waiting

Primarily other than sacramental, it means:

- a. Submergence, *i.e.*, inward concentration and detachment from the manifold outward distractions.
- b. "Preparation of the soul to become the pencil of the un-earthly writer, the bent bow of the heavenly archer, the tuned lyre of the divine musician."

Passage from the silence of Waiting to the silence before the divine presence is possible without spoken word or any other connective between.

(3) The silence of Union or Fellowship

This silence is the completion of the Waiting and Sacramental silences. The silent worship of the Quakers results in communion with the "invisible present Reality and the

<sup>1</sup>*The Idea of the Holy* (London, 1923), pp. 216-220.

mystical union of many individuals with one another." (Thus there is kinship between extremes of worship, the Quaker Meeting and the Roman Catholic Mass.)

It was Otto's point of view that unless the congregation is led to a deep and full experience of the "real presence" of God, a divine service cannot be held. This experience of the real presence of God, of the Mysterious (*i.e.*, the "*Mysterium Tremendum*" of *The Idea of the Holy*), "is made possible when the prayer of the congregation is led to an act of lofty composure in a holy silence: where the word, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them'—that word which should dominate the whole service—is fulfilled in a loftier and grander sense and degree, and a more profound and mighty experience comes to the assembled souls."<sup>2</sup> God is not always present. "The hours of His visitation and His return are rare and solemn occasions, different essentially not only from the 'profane' life of every day, but also from the calm confiding mood of the believer, whose trust is to live ever before the fact of God. They are the topmost summits in the life of the Spirit."<sup>3</sup> "If it be asked whether a Divine Service is able to achieve this, let us answer that, enough God indeed comes where and when He chooses, yet He will choose to come when we sincerely call upon Him and prepare ourselves truly for His visitation."<sup>4</sup>

With these reassurances that we can enjoy the real presence of God, and thereby achieve the true end of worship, and remembering that the necessary climax of worship is a period of silence, let us turn to the analysis and recommendations of Professor Robert Will.

#### PROFESSOR WILL

"The abundance of form is, in effect, as meaningless as its absence," writes Professor Will. The mysterious beauty of the sanctuary, the charm of the music, the flash of eloquence, the old forms of tradition, the sumptuousness of the ritual colors, in short, all the effect of elaborate ceremony and pageantry will not equal the value of the silence of an assembly of Quakers, gathered in a white-washed room. Neither will the mere absence of form of the positive Puritans. It is the synthesis of religious values which,

<sup>2</sup>R. Otto, "Towards the Reform of Divine Service," *Hibbert Journal*, Oct. 1930, pp. 1-8.

<sup>3</sup>*The Idea of the Holy*, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 220.

above all, will achieve the true purpose of worship, which is divine communion."

A service of worship must, in the first place, be constructed with due consideration of two principal characteristics of the attitude of worship in man. These two characteristics, or phases, are adoration and edification. Professor Will analyzes them and explains their places in worship as follows. Adoration is first manifest in certain *impulses*: these constitute the *desire* which provokes the religious unrest and the elevation of the spirit. In the next stage of adoration there are certain *tendencies*, which reveal a relative receptivity of the divine spirit: this is the mood of *contemplation*, which leads to the fear or to the enjoyment of God. And finally, there are *attitudes*, which denote a clearly evident passivity: this is the abandon, which permits rapture or amazement. All these three phases, desire, contemplation, abandon, have their own peculiar expressions in worship, and the union with God is achieved through their development. Adoration leads the contemplative to a sort of apotheosis.

Edification has its beginning in a kind of incarnation of the divine into the spirit, which is first receptive and then powerfully active. In the rhythm of edification we find the religious conscience evolving from a *pure* receptivity and taking up a *spontaneous* receptivity, which is manifested in divination, meditation, faith, and then proceeding to a voluntary receptivity which is translated by moral impulses into the creative activity of the Christian life. This religious and moral activity in every-day life, following the examples of Origen, Saint Francis, Luther, Rousseau, and Kant, is the ideal of worship, says Will. The combination of adoration (inducement to quiet) and edification (incentive to action) is like Greek ornamentation, where one sees mixed together the repose of linear design and the movement of organic design. In human beings adoration and edification are in a biological chain. This fact does not, however, permit a shifting of attention back and forth from one to the other. Such a constant change of emphasis is too much of a tax upon a person; so that the order of worship must follow a simple and consistent development.

To demonstrate his various points Will, like Otto, has created a model Order of Service. And, like Otto's, it has three main parts, with attention to the sermon diminished.

<sup>6</sup>Will, *Le Culte* (Strasbourg, 1924), I, p. 426. Professor Will's principal ideas are to be found in this three-volume work, one of the most comprehensive studies of worship, in any language.



Part I. The Message of the Gospel

Part II. The Sacrament of Silence

Part III. The Call to Action

Merely naming the three principal parts of the service is, however, utterly inadequate for revealing the complex nature of Will's scheme. To illustrate: Part I is divided into four phases: (a) Glorification; (b) Humiliation; (c) Concentration; (d) Penetration. Each of these parts contains God's expression of himself, through readings from the Bible, and the congregation's responses in song. For (a) and (b) the congregation stands, and this period is called "Self-Collection." For (c) and (d) the congregation is seated, and this period is called "Meditation." After an interlude of organ music Part II, the Sacrament of Silence (or the Mystery), begins. It has three phases: the desire, the intuition, and the abandonment. During Part II the congregation is kneeling, and the whole period is called "Contemplation." After a second interlude Part III begins. This is the Call to Action (or the Sacrifice). It includes three offerings, the Credo, a song or prayer, a prayer of intercession, and a canticle. For Part III the congregation stands, and the period is called "Consecration." In addition to the three main parts of the service here outlined, there are the introduction and the conclusion of the service, which correspond closely to our own conventions.

#### COMPARISON

It will be observed that Will's service seems to include Otto's service and then to go on. Part II of Will's service is a sequel to the union with God, which is intended to be the grand conclusion of Otto's service. It avoids leaving those who are capable of achieving the Mystery aloft on that remote plane, by linking up the inspiration of divine communion with mundane activity, in a consecration of self to high purpose. Part III embodies Will's edification, the process of transforming and transmitting divine inspiration into the creative activity of the Christian life.

The marked similarity of the orders of service of Otto and Will is truly representative of the general similarity of their views on the place of silence and mystery in worship. Both their orders of service represent a synthesis of traditional religious factors and include the new, important element of silence. For both these scholars communion with God, the Mystery, is the essence of worship. In both services the sermon is the concluding event in

the first part. In both services the closing parts tend to elevate the period of worship over the purely instructional phase." (The usual Protestant service in this country, by contrast, leads up to the sermon, with a sudden *dénouement* in a hymn and the benediction, or in the collection of the offerings, a hymn and the benediction.)

Nevertheless, in spite of these similarities, there are significant differences between Otto and Will, both in their services and in their chosen emphases. Otto's service, on the one hand, builds up to the Sacrament of Silence, then the minister gives his blessing, and the service concludes with a congregational hymn. Will's service, on the other hand, devotes an entire additional last part to the "return" from the mystical experience. This is the Call to Action, the consecration of the congregation to the activity of the true Christian life. Of course Otto, too, intends that the religious experience of the service of worship will translate itself into Christian living, but Will goes beyond him and supplies the link between inspiration and action. Will is deeply concerned for the accomplishment of Christian acts, and in this connection one will recall his discussion of edification. He says, referring to Otto, "The peace, the silence, will corroborate the feeling of divine communion, but we shall not follow him when he ventures to place the part of adoration on a plane superior to that which he reserves for edification. In our opinion the two attitudes are equivalent. . . . It seems to us that if, up to the present, they have, in the Protestant churches, neglected adoration, that is no reason to exaggerate its importance."

Elsewhere Will writes, "This Mystery . . . is not in its place within the limits of a large assembly. The mystic cults were at all times . . . more or less esoteric. They came together better as a few, selected initiates carried away by . . . abstractions, than as the multitude of Christians. For it is not within the power of all to make themselves pillar saints, nor to create within themselves the silence of Carmel."<sup>8</sup> Will is frankly wary. He believes that a service devoted too much to this kind of experience will not be generally practicable and effective. Otto himself admitted that the true feeling of the numinous, that is, of the Mysterious, cannot be experienced by all persons. And yet, perhaps a little inconsistently

<sup>8</sup>B. E. Meland compares Otto's and Will's services in *Modern Man's Worship*, ch. 6.

<sup>9</sup>*Le Culte*, I, p. 433

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 202

in view of this admission, he was striving for a service in which there would surely be full group participation. This point is clearly brought out in his criticism of the Mass, namely, that its tendency is to pageantry, with the absence of full group participation.

### CRITICISM

It seems unfair to say, as one critic has done,<sup>9</sup> that Otto's idea of true Christian worship is formless ecstasy, and is negative, whereas true Christian worship is positive, an offering of all our faculties to God's service. Surely there is more in Otto's service than this critic has allowed, more than formless ecstasy. The word "ecstasy," itself, bears unfortunate and inappropriate connotations. As for the positive offering of our faculties to God's service, whatever that may mean, it is safe to say that Otto has nowhere disparaged it.

With Will's insight into the emotional and psychological limitations of people, it might fairly be expected that he would produce an order of service admirably suited to their need. Whether or not he has succeeded, only experiment and a clearer understanding of what he means in his Order of Service by the repeated instances of congregational song and readings from the Bible, can tell us. At the very outset, it looks as though in trying to bring his service to a practical conclusion of edification he has made it too long for the temperament of this generation of people. Our forefathers were better at prolonged worship than we are.

Professor Bernard E. Meland has stated another type of criticism. Directed against Otto, it might also be made of Will. "Otto's proposal to introduce a sacrament of silence into the Lutheran *Gottesdienst* has evoked derisive comments from among the certain contemporary religious writers. Thus, Karl Barth, writing in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, gingerly chides the introduction of a sacrament of silence into the Church of the Word.' And Martin Schran, in *Die Reform des Gottesdienstes und die hochkirchliche Bewegung*, refers to the sacrament of silence as an 'unevangelical phenomenon'." These arguments are made from a prejudice against change and new departure. They do not convince the liberal critic. The first, that of Karl Barth, is hardly more than a play on words. The second seeks strength in archaic precedent. Otto and Will are sincere in their support of the Word, even

<sup>9</sup>F. H. Bryant, "Worship in General," in *Liturgy and Worship*, edited by W. K. L. Clarke (New York, 1932), p. 28.



though they may reduce its prominence in the order of service. They do so only in the belief that it is for the best interests of Protestantism, which they remark themselves is the religion of the Word. They mean only to supplement the Word by the introduction of the silent period, that the whole service may be the more fruitful for all faithful worshippers.

### CONCLUSION

Have the exhaustive studies and experiments of Otto and Will provided the solution to the problem of enriching the experience of modern Protestant worship, or is the end of searching and trial not yet? The answer is governed by certain unfavorable conclusions regarding their proposed orders of service, which can hardly be denied. In the first place, a sense of mystic union with God at a prescribed time and in unison with a whole congregation would come, if at all, only after rigorous training in self-control and discipline. It is safe to say that no ordinary congregation of the laity could achieve this. In the second place, a group of people so trained would inevitably be small, because of the selective forces of temperament and opportunity. In the third place, a very high degree of compatibility within the group would be necessary to permit the complete self-forgetfulness and unself-consciousness imperative to common mystical experience, and it would be difficult to create a group of such singleness of spirit in the ordinary church.

Thus, a minister's consideration of the mood and character of his people, at least in this era, would surely oblige him to be very cautious in endeavoring to employ this means of inducing the most rewarding of spiritual experiences, the true end of worship, communion with God.

But, in discovering the limitations to the practice of theory which human nature imposes to its own disadvantage, we have by no means set at nought these efforts of Otto and Will. They have explored and they have outlined. Their patterns are attractive. Must they be distorted to fit the human personality, the ambitions of theory forsaken? Or can human nature be cultivated to achieve these standards? If Otto and Will are right in their emphasis upon Mystery and Silence, then somewhere in between their patterns and our human nature lies the ultimate, practical result, to be gained through a degree of modification on the one hand, and through a measure of growth, on the other.

## "South of God"

JOSEPH F. FLETCHER

Claude Williams is a remarkable man and a sturdy exponent of prophetic religion. Cedric Belfrage came over here from England a few years ago and met him South in the cotton country. The result was a biography of "Reverend" Williams which first appeared in England under imprint of the Left Book of the Month Club as *Let My People Go*. This year the Modern Age Books have printed an American edition as *South of God*. It's a very effective pick-me-up for anybody who suffers the defeatism of middle-class religion.

Try to imagine the "tail-spins" and "*Blitzkrieg*" experiences of a man who studied for gospel-work with the Cumberlands in Tennessee, then read and accepted modernism in Harry Emerson Fosdick, met Alva Taylor at Vanderbilt and saw a connection between religion and the social question, ran into the brutality of planters trying to frighten the share-croppers away from union organization, became a Socialist and eventually headed Commonwealth College during its severest period of red-baiting, and finally rounded full circle back to Bible-religion as the "indigenous approach" to Christian social leadership. Claude Williams has survived the full course. Today he is the most effective and "indigenous" leader of share-croppers, Southern mill hands and their preachers in the American scene.

"The Bible is the language and the learning of the Southern farmer and of his children in the new factory towns. Helping him to keep his shirt in the social struggle brought on by King Cotton's fall and to climb out of peonage means helping him with the Bible in our hands and its texts on our lips." This is the natural tool of prophetic leadership Claude Williams is using in the program of the People's Institute of Applied Religion.<sup>1</sup> It doesn't mean faking a Fundamentalist jargon merely as a means to secular or unreligious ends. Far from it. Brother Claude still has all

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<sup>1</sup>Readers of this JOURNAL will be interested to know that the following Unitarians are among the sponsors of Claude Williams' organization: Sydney L. Snow, John Howland Lathrop, L. M. Birkhead, and James Luther Adams. Kenneth Leslie and Rev. Joseph F. Fletcher, contributors to this issue of the JOURNAL, are also on the list of sponsors.

the rich poetry and imagery of the Good Book as an ingrained part of him. He simply takes his stand for democracy and economic justice on the Bible. There isn't any other way to show the cross-roads preacher and his flock that Christianity has social implications; there isn't any other way to purge the "opium" in the hell-fire-and-damnation pattern that enslaves the Southern worker precisely because his faith is a vital one. The People's Institute wants that faith to be the truth that sets men free, right here in history now as well as beyond it!

The People's Institute of Applied Religion is not a "social gospel" optimism urging confidence in a benevolent history, either. Perhaps the chief thing that guards it against utopian tendencies is that there are painfully obvious evils confronting it at every step of the way, social evils too obvious to provide a setting for the Comfortable Gospel. Let's put a name to three of them: economic peonage, political protofascism and the Bible Belt Nazis (this last bit of terminology was devised by Roy and Alma Tozier last March in *The New Republic*). Just a few words about each of them will be enough to sketch in the main outlines of our picture.

Peonage may exist "south of the border" but it can be found south of the Mason-Dixon line, too. Shall we call it the agrarian equivalent of wage slavery in the industrial North, just to purge ourselves of any righteous pretensions if we happen to live North of God? This is no place to review the wealth of sorry data about the collapse of cotton tenancy, the sprawling tide of "tractored out" migrants and the exploitation of dispossessed farm families by Southern Chambers of Commerce, in partnership with "runaway" factories escaping the wage standards established by collective bargaining in the North. Mr. Roosevelt (1936 vintage) called it America's Number One Economic Problem. The poverty aspect is perhaps better known than the peonage part of it but the conditions laid down for propertyless workers in share-cropping agreements are as good an object lesson as we could find to show that political independence is a snare and delusion when coupled with economic dependence. The People's Institute is working as wisely as possible with trade union leadership to offer expression and form to the growth of feeling down South that democracy is a pretty big word. I heard an old negro preacher utter a prophetic remark on the subject. He said, mildly, "God told us we would have to earn our bread in the sweat of our brow but He didn't



say we'd have to sweat first to get bread for a lot of people who ain't got any sweat on *their brow!*" That's a deep thought, brother.

Take the proto-fascist politics in their region. (We'll forget Mayor Hague and Henry Ford's Harry Bennet for the moment, and think only about public servants like Boss Crump in Memphis.) Ten millions of the folks that will hear the message of the People's Institute have no vote. The poll-tax, believe it or not, is a property qualification for citizenship in states where very few people have any property. They're getting so they don't like it. More and more of them learn to read a little bit and they see in the papers that the right to vote in a democracy can't in any way be abridged except for crime or rebellion. They begin to feel just a mite rebellious because they do not feel that poverty is a crime. At least, they don't feel it's *their* crime. A young farmer from southern Missouri asked me (just as a matter of rhetoric; he knew the answer), "Where's the democracy to make America safe for again if I'm conscripted by the vote of Congressmen I can't vote for?" Take Martin Dies, for example. He is elected by less than ten per cent of the adults in his Congressional district in Texas and kept there term after term by the same élite. Naturally it's the poll-tax Congressmen who introduce the anti-labor bills in Washington. They aren't answerable to the people. Democratic party machines hold the fort for them while they work in the Capitol. Boss Crump in Memphis, in Secretary Hull's home state, nearly caught the People's Institute of Applied Religion napping last December. He planned a little "race riot" to break up a meeting they were planning in Memphis but the grape-vine warned them and the meeting went to St. Louis instead.

The Bible Belt Nazis have been getting a good start in recent years. The racial ideologies of men like Gerald Winrod and the Rev. Gerald K. Smith, spread through fundamentalist printing houses and over radios controlled by men like Goat-gland Brinkley, are spreading out in step with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. The Grand Kleagles of the Klan have in the past few weeks made a public announcement that their newest idea is to use "mechanized units" in a streamlined campaign. This evangelism, as Stokes of Scripps-Howard has shown, is tied up with an anti-labor program aimed particularly against the mass organization by C.I.O. of agricultural and textile workers. As a bit of clinical evidence that the Toziers are right about a coordinated propaganda of race bigotry, inspired by anti-democratic groups on

a national scale, we point to the slang words "Hebe" and "Zig" which have just appeared on the streets and highways of the South of late. These terms for Jew and Negro aren't "indigenous" in the least. They come from industrial centers like Flint and Detroit.

The December conference of the People's Institute, diverted from Memphis by Boss Crump's law-and-order methods, met in St. Louis in March. About thirty-five preachers, farmers, crop-pers and unionists came. Most of them were two or three of these things rolled into one. They spent three days comparing notes on their common problems and working out methods for spreading the gospel of prophetic religion. One of the devices they use is the Visual-Aid chart, to give a graphic presentation of the social implications of the Bible in economic, political and church life. It's all very simple and homely and probably beyond the grasp of highly sophisticated theologians who live entirely in another world where higher criticism is common parlance but definitely not "understandable of the people." The St. Louis (Episcopal) Cathedral was host to an unprecedented grass-roots religious discussion on those three days.

There isn't space here to tell their story in the rich detail it deserves. These fundamentalist preachers showed rare humility when the escapist and unrelated character of typical cross-roads preaching was revealed. One old fellow called the prophetic-social note of the People's Institute the "missing link" of the southern pulpit and cried *Mea culpa* for his own failure to use it in the past. They were electrified. Another member of the group, a Negro, told some stories of the working of special providence, implying that class and racial conflict can be solved through prayer, but he was quickly challenged by a younger Negro present, who remarked that God works through "instrumentalities" (neat phrase for human agency) and that he won't save us in spite of ourselves.

The stark simplicity of their social situation, in conflict and poverty, produces sharp social insights. They fully understand the meaning of the word "sin" when its social phases are brought out. One young man who had to threaten (violence to) a riding-boss to get his girl-wife a pair of shoes before crop time, ended with the profound observation that "people are just as selfish as people will let them be." Through social experience they are learn-

g the meaning of Brotherhood as pious slogans have never yet brought it home.

One preacher said, "I've lived all my life in the South and in the past four-five years I've seen a miracle. There's a union in my country and I belong. With my own ears I've heard the white members call the black members Brother, and the black members call the white members Brother. Course, at meetings they still sit on opposite sides of the hall, just to obey the law. But now, for the first time, we understand that law is a law against Brotherhood! Some time ago some white delegates went to the boss for a raise. He said 'All right boys, you can have your raise but I won't give one damn cent more to those niggers than the law requires.' The white men just got up and walked out. Next day they were laid off and then the Negro members begged to strike in support. But the white men told 'em to stay in there and keep drawing their pay. They'd work it out another way. So they accused the boss of unfair labor practice and in the end got a ten-cents an hour increase for everybody, white and black. That's Brotherhood, brothers!"

So they're learning. And the People's Institute is on the right track. We'll hear more from it, we can be sure, as the struggle for democracy tightens. Their religion may yet cease to be opium and become a power to move mountains of inertia and injustice. They will learn from the Institute that they don't "get religion" when it is real and prophetic but that religion is something that sets them, like Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven, and forces them to be doers of the Word. They are learning that "conversion" not only changes a man's life but that it changes the lives of those about him. They will see that sin (*hamartía*) means missing the mark in social as well as personal life; that sin and salvation are public as well as private matters; that "conversion" means a redirection of society as well as of the individual. And they will learn (events will insure it) that their churches must become a fellowship of and by and for the people.

They won't be content for ever with Mr. Wilson's *dictum*. Mr. Wilson owns the biggest cotton plantation in the world, down in Arkansas. One day they sent farther south for a trial-preacher (white) to try out for one of the pulpits on the place. He happened to ride up in the smoker with Mr. Wilson and the preacher



asked the planter if he belonged to the church. "Hell, no," was the reply. "The church belongs to me."

Here is a brief statement of the Institute's principles. Forgetting the theological window-dressing of most religious constitutions, isn't this just about essential Christianity as a Way of Life?

The People's Institute of Applied Religion is a voluntary association of town and country people for the purpose of applying the principles of co-operation and brotherhood:

- (1) Toward a better understanding of one another, and a fuller knowledge of our mutual problems (Study).
- (2) Toward solving the immediate economic problems of our people (Co-operation).
- (3) Toward perfecting the democratic way of life for all people (Brotherhood).

To this end

- (1) We shall stop our ears to all words of hate.
- (2) We shall guard our tongues from all words of bitterness.
- (3) We shall not be enlisted in any group which takes the law into its own hands or seeks to attain its end by mob violence.
- (4) We shall not be enlisted in any program organized to oppress any class or race.
- (5) We shall not be enlisted in any movement or program to defame or persecute the Jewish people or any other religious group.
- (6) We shall not be enlisted in any movement which is anti-religious or whose leaders are avowed atheists.

We shall ever stand

- (1) For the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.
- (2) For the complete separation of the church and the state and for the freedom of conscience and worship.
- (3) For freedom of speech and of the press; the right of peaceful assemblage; the right to petition for redress; and the right of labor to bargain collectively through representatives of its own choosing.
- (4) For the right of all citizens to exercise their political franchise by free access to the ballot in their several states.

We believe

- (1) In the religion of Righteousness, Justice, Faith and Brotherhood as contained in the Old and New Testaments.
- (2) In the Constitution of the United States and its amendments and in our free institutions guaranteed by it.
- (3) In extending the privileges and benefits of our heritage to all people without regard to race, sex, creed or color.

## Book Reviews

### "STRANGE THINGS HAPPENIN' IN THIS LAND"

This is the story of the growth of a soul and of the judgment of a man upon a civilization gone mad and upon a church gone soft.<sup>1</sup>

Claude Williams was born in the Tennessee Hill country. He was reared in a climate of spiritual determinism, race prejudice and clan loyalty. He developed within these hard shells, breaking them one after another, learning to find his way in the world of thought and his place in history. It is a drama of the first order, a thrilling story of conflict, internal and external, in which the protagonist stricken by the love of man for man, successfully engages one after another the enemies of that love.

"I had a rare experience," Belfrage said after he had met Williams, "I had met a Christian. There was nothing I could do but write about it."

Some churchmen insisting on the exact orthodoxy of their "Christians" will say, indeed have said, that Belfrage did not know a Christian when he saw one and that Williams is not a Christian. And they may congratulate themselves on being speciously correct; for Belfrage had come to the conclusion that "good" consisted of a certain kind of social order, whereas they know with their minds that "good" consists of praise of God and that a social order will be but one means to the end of the praise of God. It is possible too, that Claude Williams himself may have been guilty of forgetting to praise God with words, in the bitter stress of praising Him with deeds.

The mystic's or the child's insight is needed here to point out that a man may be so close to God in a shoulder to shoulder relationship that he may momentarily lose the face to face relationship, especially when many of the most urgent singers of "face to face" have busied themselves in hindering his work. Williams bears in his body the witness of his act of love. His theory may waver, but his life moves straight and inexorably as an arrow to its mark. Let learned theorists remember that Jesus too had his atheist mood.

Belfrage is typical of those disillusioned sons of the Church who through no fault of their own but through the fault of the Church have, as he says, "associated religion with starch." Williams had been able to remain within the Church. He was a minister, and could sympathize with ministers, knowing their temptations. He had been able through the medium of the Church to develop his own intellectual life, to escape the taboos and medievalisms of his youth. He had been able to use the social program of his church (Presbyterian) as a charter for his social interpretation of the Gospel. And therefore although he was impelled to write to the Presbytery, "I have been so busy doing what I feel the Master would have me do in behalf of the hungry, naked and sick multitudes that I have had no time to bother with the ecclesiastical machinery you brethren so efficiently and effectively run," nevertheless he had never renounced the Church. For he realized, as Belfrage would find it more difficult to realize, the debt he owed to the tradition on which the Church had nourished him.

**SOUTH OF GOD.** By Cedric Belfrage. New York: Modern Age Books, 1941. 46 pp. \$2.50.

For Belfrage Williams may be another illusion. For Fascists, he will be an enemy to be whipped. For Communists, he will be a tool to be used. For Christians, he is a new courage, new strength, and for a Christian world his work is essential.

Space allows but brief indication of what this work is. It is Williams' contention that by and large the Church is not carrying the democratic meat of the Gospel to the people who desperately need it to bring in the Democracy of God. So he goes to the grass-roots preachers "who work during the week with the people they preach to on Sunday; who know one Book, and know it well."

Williams says, "These people in tents, in windowless churches, in deserted school houses, in ruined saw mills in the woods are speaking every Sunday to Dixie: to the people fascism must use if it is to succeed . . . we can leave them right where they are in the doctrinal beliefs and *add something*. Through them, every man must hear the democratic message in the language to which he is born."

"One of these grass-roots preachers at an Institute meeting said, 'God is love, and without love no man can see the Kingdom. Someone said to me, 'Do you love the planters?' Well I don't leave the planters' ways. We are commanded to love the brethren. I believe the union is one of the greatest forces in the world as to bringing people together and Christianizing them.'"

Yes, the union. As crude as the cross, and as frail as flesh! For unions mean distress and controversy and dispute and persecution and name-calling and betrayal of friendship and the splitting wide open of families and churches. Yet Williams *insists* on the flesh, the incarnation, the *living resolution* of all dialectics in *act*, in this case the *union*. So Williams becomes the conscience of the modern Protestant world, confronting it with the flesh of its own dream; shaming it into new life.

He thus challenges the whole of democracy and implies in his action that democracy must be Christian to survive. This is very important. In a sense the social gospel is "rationalizing" the individual gospel as the machine "rationalized" the handloom. But Williams is more than a social gospeller. He incarnates in his own person the hurt of hurt Negroes and of stunted and starved poor whites. He is *one of them*. He lifts the social gospel into a new dimension. He *identifies* himself with the submerged people of the plantation South and he sows the dream of an abundant life in their hearts and he is beaten and jailed and thrown out of his church and called a Communist.

This is the story of a man becoming lost with the lost that they may be found. It is quite simply the story of Jesus, the best story we have, the human story, the divine story, the one we sing about and paint pictures about and build cathedrals about, and write theologies about. But this came first. This is the Word. The words came afterwards.

The Protestant Digest,  
New York City.

Kenneth Leslie.



## AN EXCITING STORY

Here we have a clear moving narrative of the usage of American churches in hymnody.<sup>1</sup> It does not attempt the encyclopaedic completeness of the earlier work of Julian or of Benson. But here is an amplitude of material, well selected and doing full justice to all the major strains of American religious song. Here you may learn of the long reign of the Bay Psalm Book. Here you may learn who lost or mislaid the great Latin hymns for so long a time, and why the German chorales were so long unknown in England or New England. Here is the dramatic story of the change from Psalms translated to Psalms paraphrased, on to the freedom of "man-made hymns." Here are many interesting individual facts, as to Benjamin Franklin in the role of hymnbook publisher, as to the earliest American hymn still in common use, as to the original popular character of some of the finest tunes of the Geneva Psalter. Here also is the truth about the Puritan's attitude toward music and the musical instruments of Colonial times. Here you discover that for the whole of the eighteenth century the chief center of musical distinction in America was the Moravian church in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Especially notable is Dr. Foote's long chapter about the great individual writers in the mid-nineteenth century, appraising also the publications of the leading American denominations. The "gospel song" period is not given so much space, but all that it requires. Invaluable is the section covering more recently published hymnbooks, offering brief but excellent critical judgment of their varying merits, even down to the recent book edited by Professor Tweedy. The author does not try to mention everything, though I wish he might have added *The Student Hymnary* lately compiled by President Emeritus Edward Dwight Eaton, D.D., especially because it contains an experimental section of what are called "Lyrics of the Spirit." Valuable also in this book, is the considerable number of biographical footnotes concerning hymn writers.

In his critiques, Dr. Foote finds some items of incompetence and some villains. Amongst the latter are those who made an unwarrantable alteration of the Jewish Yigdal. One might wish that there had been space for more extended comment on the canons of judgment as to hymn tunes.

The book is an exciting story which reads like a novel mounting to a genuine climax of wonder as to who is going to write the hymns for the coming day. Through it all, Dr. Foote makes us realize afresh the significance of song, both for religion and for society. As Andrew Fletcher's aphorism has it: "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws."

The First Unitarian Society of Chicago.

VON OGDEN VOGT.

<sup>1</sup>THREE CENTURIES OF AMERICAN HYMNODY. By Henry Wilder Foote. Cambridge: The Harvard University Press, 1940. 418 pp. \$4.00

## A TEXT IN TIME

The time has long passed when a minister was afraid to preach a sermon without a scripture text, lest it might be suspected that what he was setting forth was not a sermon; the time has also passed (though not so long passed) when a liberal minister was afraid to use a scripture text, lest he be suspected of not being liberal. Liberal ministers indeed are beginning to look upon the Bible, particularly the prophetic writings, not as an unworked mine, but an abandoned one, with plentiful riches for him who will take it over to extract its gold and silver by new processes. They are finding too that their people, for a generation or two carefully weaned from the Bible, are grateful to be led back to it, and are ready to give fresh appreciation to its by now unfamiliar values. Liberal theological students, whose predecessors of a few years ago were irked by requirements of biblical study, are now, because of interest in the subject and awareness of its significance, electing courses in this field.

To the preacher on timely questions, therefore, Doctor Joy's topical concordance<sup>1</sup> will be a necessary addition to his reference book shelf. It is not merely a bulky volume for hunting up a verse recalled but not placed; it is rather a scriptural first-aid kit for the preacher. Under 2100 headings, 25,000 verses are listed; and many of the headings are such as might leap to a preacher's mind in connection with sermon preparation. Some of necessity are general, or of no obvious homiletical significance, but in the main they are specific and suggestive. Thumbing this book in the early stages of his preparation a preacher might find a text with which to develop his theme in the old-fashioned textual way,—a way so long disused in liberal pulpits as to seem fresh and original. Or, with a sermon already on the stocks, he might find here a verse leading to a pat illustration; or a text to start out with, giving him the introductory approach that had eluded his search.

To revert to our analogy of a mine, this book is to the old type of concordance as modern drills and explosives are to picks, shovels, sledge-hammers and spikes. Let him use it who would operate with modern equipment.

The Meadville Theological School

SYDNEY B. SNOW.

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<sup>1</sup>HARPER'S TOPICAL CONCORDANCE. Compiled by Charles R. Joy. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940. 478 pp. \$3.95.

## A NEW QUARTERLY

The first issue of *The Humanist*, a quarterly magazine published by The American Humanist Association, 301 North Mayfield Avenue, Chicago, has just been received. Edwin H. Wilson is the Editor and Alfred Stiernotte the Editorial Assistant. James H. Leuba, Roy Wood Sellars, Max C. Otto, Harry Elmer Barnes, Curtis W. Reese, and Archie J. Bahm are among the contributors to the Spring number. The price is 25c a copy or \$1 a year.



## Communication

Mr. Edward Shils, the translator of Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, has received from Professor Mannheim the following letter commenting on Mr. Shils's and Mr. Merton's articles on Mannheim which appeared in the Winter 1941 issue of our JOURNAL. We are grateful to Mr. Shils for the permission to publish certain portions of this letter:

My dear Shils:

It was very kind of you to send me the issue of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION as a surprise, as it contains such an excellent discussion of the ideas I am struggling to develop. What I mostly appreciate in that issue is that the discussion is based upon a painstaking, accurate study of my publications and all its criticisms I value more highly than the general appraisals which seem to be the fashion here. It is really the mastery of details which helps us to progress in our work. Writing to you, I of course wish to concentrate on a few points only which you have put forward. But first, I want to emphasize how good the presentation of the material is, definitely much better than mine because you so arranged the material that the salient points stand out clearly. . . .

(1) On page 150 of the JOURNAL, you regret that I did not define the term "fundamental democratization" and have given no illustration of it. I feel that this has been done on p. 45 and p. 50 of *Man and Society*. Even if these definitions are very brief, in my opinion they convey the meaning I intended. The best proof is your presentation which conveys exactly the meaning I had in mind. I start with that point because at the end of the review you say that my definitions are seldom free from ambiguity. You may be right in general, although I try to do more in this respect than one usually does, which makes the book more difficult to read, but I would be very grateful if you could give me more instances so that I may improve these passages in the next edition.

(2) In another passage you criticize me for not giving an explanation as to why planning will be unavoidable in the future. I think this is presented strongly by the great emphasis which is laid on key positions in modern society and on the density of organized fields as compared with the unorganized ones in modern society. (Cf. e.g. pp. 152 ff. and pp. 155 ff. of *Man and Society*.)

(3) In your remark, p. 152 of the JOURNAL, I agree partly with you and partly not, when you state that I do not make a clear difference between state-regulated capitalism and democratic socialism and that I am in general too vague about the economic system. There are two reasons for this. First, I am not yet quite ready with all these problems, and I have spent a great deal of time since the publication of the book in studying the existing experiments in "good and bad planning." But apart from this personal limitation, there is a very good objective reason for not putting forward more than one is able to state with confidence. My feeling is that the old alternatives, clichés, and blueprints are out of date, and as a student of politics I do not want to fall too easily into one of the ready-made moulds.



Therefore I thought it would be best to emphasize those items irrespective of "isms" to which they belong, where a possible solution is in the making. . . .

(4) As to the level of generality and the hypothetical form in which my proposals are presented, you are right that one could have done better, but if you were only to try to draw together the huge body of material which is needed at the present stage of integration, you would also realize the difficulties of your request. A different kind of minuteness and accuracy is needed if you make a monographic study, let me say, on the "Gangs" or on the "Polish Peasant." My task is to draw together key facts and to elaborate, with a specific type of scientific imagination, the kind of interdependence which is likely to prevail. This cannot be done on the basis of the same techniques of collecting material and presenting evidence which prevail in field-work or in other more limited studies. Many of my statements are supported by other investigations. (This is the reason I had to give such extensive foot-notes.) Some others are in so far self-evident as our common experience makes them very probable and acceptable, and it would be simply a waste of time at this level of the argument to bring in too many concrete proofs. For instance, the thesis concerning the concentration of the means of warfare making for control by minorities could be supported by facts the presentation of which would fill volumes, but we do not produce them because once this kind of truth is stated it seems to be too trivial and self-evident to be specially corroborated. This again does not mean that after similar books dealing with the coordination of such key observations have been written, many of their statements which are really too hypothetical, should not be later corroborated by detailed investigations. . . .

One more word, and this on Merton's article. I am most grateful for his very conscientious and sound criticism. It has the merit of being really honest, whereas Schelting, by suppressing the *Handwörterbuch* article, made it too easy a game to discuss my problems, and made it even easier by omitting the *crucial* arguments in my studies against the Kant-Rickert philosophy. Merton does not do this, but he is still too much under the spiritual influence of the Idealistic approach, and he fails to see once more where the real difference rests. . . .

Apart from the isolation [caused by the war] "intra arma silent Musae," life is most stimulating here. To the sociologist it is a great experience to see how great are the possibilities of changing human behavior, if only the whole environment changes completely. I wish we had a trained team from Overseas here to observe these changes adequately. . . .

I am most grateful to you for having sent me this issue of THE JOURNAL OF LIBERAL RELIGION. Thanking you once more for your most valuable review, I am

Yours cordially,

3, Westminster College Bounds,  
Cambridge, England  
April 3, 1941

KARL MANNHEIM.